

Sight & Sound

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE



September II

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James Marsh's
'Project Nim'

Brendan Gleeson
in 'The Guard'

Dirk Bogarde
A Class Act

PLUS

Jean Renoir's
'French Cancan'

Ben Wheatley's
'Kill List'

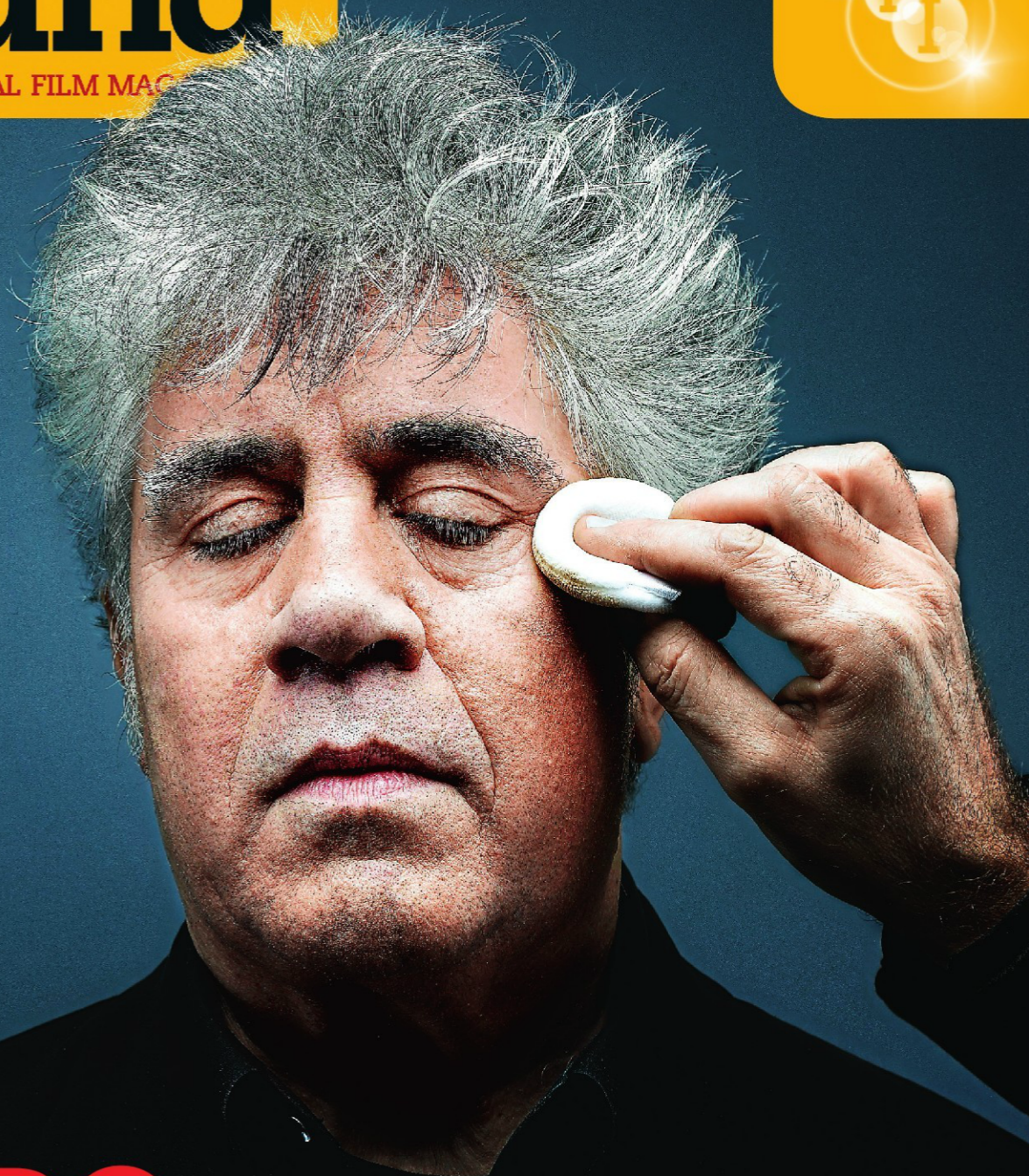
Gillian Wearing's
'Self Made'

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INTERVIEW

PEDRO ALMODÓVAR

ON THE HORROR BEHIND 'THE SKIN I LIVE IN'

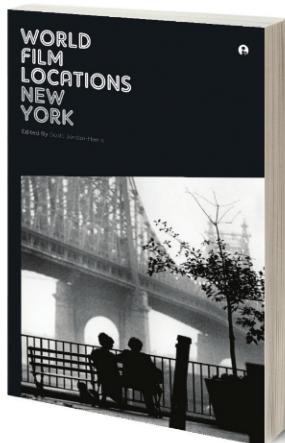


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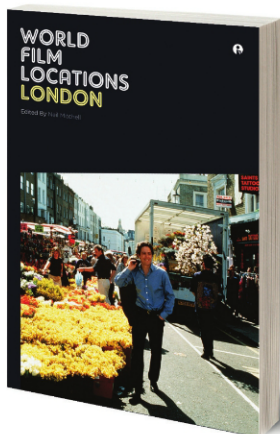
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Be they period films, cult classics, or elaborate directorial love letters, New York City has played – and continues to play – a central role in the imaginations of film-makers and movie-goers worldwide. The stomping ground of *King Kong*, it is also the place where young Jackie Rabinowitz of *The Jazz Singer* realizes his Broadway dream. Later, it is the backdrop against which taxi driver Travis Bickle exacts a grisly revenge. The inaugural volume in an exciting new series from Intellect, *World Film Locations: New York* pairs incisive profiles of quintessential New York film-makers – among them Woody Allen, Martin Scorsese, Sidney Lumet, and Spike Lee – with essays on key features of the city's landscape that have appeared on the big screen.

"An elegant tribute to the films and locations that have given New York its private real estate in our minds. The contributors are so immediately readable and movie-savvy." – Roger Ebert



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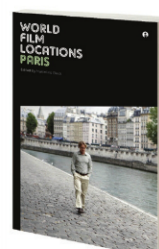
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COVER

Pedro Almodóvar

Photograph © Denis Rouvre/

Corbis Outline

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Welcome. One hallmark of a great director is his or her ability to see a new side of a great film actor. Just as this month's cover star Pedro Almodóvar (left, and p.18) finds a new darkness in his former 'chico' Antonio Banderas in *The Skin I Live In*, so our very own Dirk Bogarde (far left on the set of *Death in Venice*, and p.40) was transformed from lightweight matinee idol into European arthouse icon in the hands of Luchino Visconti. But then even Bogarde's ability to teach himself new tricks pales in comparison to the chimpanzee-raised-as-human experiment charted in *Project Nim* (p.34). Elsewhere we sample a gamut of filmmaking in Britain – from the 21st-century hitman nightmare of *Kill List* (p.28) to the 1970s rural elegy of *Requiem for a Village* (p.38) – and across the sea in Ireland (p.46), where the cop comedy *The Guard* provides a role tailor-made for another great screen presence, Brendan Gleeson. ➡ **Nick James**

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NICK JAMES ENDGAMES



The two great audiovisual talking points of this summer have been Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life* and television coverage of the phone-hacking saga. Rest assured I'm not going to rehash either story here, except

to suggest that these two events encourage different attitudes towards my real subject: the endings of films. Put broadly, *The Tree of Life* wants us to speculate on our own ends, whereas the hacking saga leads us to desire a vengeful end for those who abuse power.

How audiences and filmmakers think and feel about endings is on my mind for three reasons: 1) I recently taught a seminar on the subject at the London Film School; 2) Gillian Wearing's new film *Self Made* (see p.12) encourages her participants to act out their own film endings as an act of catharsis; 3) I rewatched Lars von Trier's forthcoming release *Melancholia* (to be featured next issue), in which the rogue planet Melancholia collides with the earth and destroys it (no spoiler alert necessary – you see it in the first ten minutes), presumably ending all human life.

For the audience to want a film never to end (as we feel about our own existences), or to want instead the catharsis of seeing justice done (and perhaps seeing someone 'evil' die or be humbled), are two contrary yet equally satisfactory emotions for filmmakers to induce. *Melancholia* brings these two ideas together and subverts them. Lars von Trier's idea of justice – at least when he's suffering from the kind of depressive state we see portrayed by Kirsten Dunst in the film – is that humanity deserves to be destroyed. Thus the film challenges the audience's natural desire to survive.

In doing so, von Trier underscores the fear attached to all endings, for anxieties about the end are, of course, anxieties about one's own end. In *Three Uses of the Knife*, David Mamet writes about how screenwriters faced with writing an ending find themselves in a similar exhausted state to that of their protagonists, who have undergone gruelling trials. The writer's attitude becomes: come on now, it's obvious what's going to happen – do I really have to write it down?

One interesting thing about separating out the endings of films is how strangely out-of-character with the rest of the film they often seem. Krzysztof Kieslowski, for instance, is not known as an over-the-top director, but if you isolate the final

sequence of *Three Colours Blue*, it seems rather strident. Without seeing the gradual phases of grief suffered by Juliette Binoche's character, the choral symphony dedicated to love at the end combined with the montage of minor characters touched by her life seem excessive.

Endings also tend to have an edge of absurdity to them. In the last scene of *Fight Club*, for instance, we know the film's suddenly in trouble because Edward Norton's alter ego Brad Pitt self-reflexively refers to "flashback humour" and "tying up loose ends" as he forces Norton to watch his version of Armageddon – the destruction of financial centres. The filmmakers' solution – having Norton shoot himself in the mouth, injuring one side of his face but 'killing' the evil macho alter ego – is beyond risible. But screenwriter Jim Uhls and director David Fincher get away with it by using distractive humour – Norton's henchmen constantly draw attention to the state of Norton's face, which we can't see

'The Tree of Life' wants us to speculate on our own ends, whereas the hacking saga leads us to desire a vengeful end for those who abuse power

properly. They make comedy of absurdity. Howard Hawks would be proud.

Many are the ways to signal the end of a film, some less obvious than others: killing the protagonist or antagonist, or both (*In Bruges*), answering the will they won't they question (they will – *The Philadelphia Story*, they won't – *The Third Man*), the switcheroo (*The Sixth Sense*), the big consoling speech (*Fanny and Alexander*), the factual forecast (in text for biopics), the comic reveal (*Shaun of the Dead*), the ambiguous open ending (*Inception*), and the mysterious semi-reveal (*Hidden*). It might make a fun summer-evening game to show people obscure endings of films and have them make up what came before.

But to find my own ending, I'll return to *Melancholia* in search of a more positive outcome. In Frank Kermode's seminal book *The Sense of an Ending* he notes that the original title of Jean-Paul Sartre's novel *Nausea* was *Melancholia*, named after Albrecht Dürer's engraving. "Melancholy is not only an illness," Kermode writes with regard to the Dürer, "she is also the patroness of creativity. Alone and desperate amongst all those discrete objects... she will discover an order."



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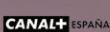
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IN CINEMAS
AUGUST 26

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editing: JOSÉ SALCEDO director of photography: JOSÉ LUIS ALCÁINE written by PEDRO ALMODÓVAR
in collaboration with AGUSTÍN ALMODÓVAR based on "Mygale" the novella by Thierry Jonquet.



directed by PEDRO ALMODÓVAR



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BRIEF GORE & VERY STRONG LANGUAGE

Rushes

News, opinion, festivals and coming events

THE BIGGER PICTURE



Grand master flash

Expectations for Wong Kar-Wai's forthcoming martial-arts film 'The Grandmasters' couldn't be higher after the lacklustre 'My Blueberry Nights' (2007). And judging by the film's stylish trailer – which features Tony Leung (right) as Ip Man (the legendary father of Wing Chun kung fu, and the man who trained Bruce Lee) fighting off dozens of assailants in a rain-soaked alleyway – the film will

be every bit as dynamic and beautifully shot as we've come to expect from the director of 'In the Mood for Love' and 'Chungking Express'. It also reunites Leung with his co-star in Wong's '2046'; Zhang Ziyi (above). No release date had been confirmed at the time of going to press, but rumours persist that the film could yet sneak into one of the big late-summer film festivals.



A pinch of salt

Director Gianni Di Gregorio tells **Pasquale Iannone** about discovering *'The Salt of Life'*

One of the most satisfying aspects of Italian cinema's recent revival has been its formal and thematic diversity – from the neo-Viscontian grandeur of Luca Guadagnino's *I Am Love* (*Io sono l'amore*, 2009) to the quiet philosophical ruminations of Michelangelo Frammartino's *Le quattro volte* (2010). In 2008, 59-year-old screenwriter Gianni Di Gregorio made his directorial debut with *Mid-August Lunch* (*Pranzo di ferragosto*), a low-budget 75-minute comedy in which a middle-aged man is forced to look after his nonagenarian mother and three of her friends during a sweltering Roman summer.

The film had been almost a decade in the making. "I took it around several producers and they all thought I was crazy to make a film about a group of old ladies," Di Gregorio recalls. "When we finally got the money together, we didn't have enough to hire [a lead] actor and so I ended up playing the part. I found that working together with the other actors, I could influence the tone of a scene a lot more than if I was stuck behind the camera." The result proved an unprecedented success both critically and commercially. Di Gregorio admits to being touched by the public's response to what was a small, sincere labour of love – but also terrified at the prospect of making a follow-up.

His new film *The Salt of Life* (*Gianni e le donne*) draws on Di Gregorio's own discovery that, as a man in his early sixties, he doesn't seem to be noticed by women anymore. "Gianni's predicament in the film is something that I've gone through myself – many of my friends have too," he explains. "The feeling that, after you reach a certain age, women seem to look at you differently, almost like an object, a piece of furniture. I thought that by doing the film I could get rid of this feeling – but I'm afraid it doesn't work!" Around this central premise – the crisis of an ordinary man approaching old age – Di Gregorio crafts a beautifully observed, bittersweet comedy in the tradition of the great *commedia all'italiana*.

Ninety-five-year-old Valeria De Franciscis Bondoni reprises her role as Gianni's mother, a formidable *grande dame* whose carefree spending is the cause of much consternation for her son. "The role was relatively minor in the original screenplay," says Di Gregorio. "but once we started



'Working together with the other actors, I could influence a scene a lot more than if I was stuck behind the camera'

shooting, the character seemed to grow and grow. It almost seemed to be out of my control."

Mid-August Lunch was shot largely within the confines of Gianni's apartment. But with *The Salt of Life*, Di Gregorio made a deliberate decision to move away from a single location. "As much as I enjoyed the process of making the previous film, it could get a little claustrophobic," he admits. "For *The Salt of Life*, I wanted to shoot a lot of exteriors and include lots of new faces. Not only did I want to explore my own neighbourhood of Trastevere, but I wanted to get out into other parts of Rome too."

Di Gregorio goes on to explain the presence of three old men seen throughout the film sitting outside the local bar: "They're three legendary characters in Trastevere – they've been sitting there at the same spot for over 30 years. I had often thought about making a film about them, but could never find a way to approach it." In *The Salt of Life*, Gianni is dismayed to find out that one of the men – the tracksuited Maurizio (Maurizio Persichetti) – is enjoying an affair with the strikingly beautiful woman who runs the local tobacconist. This discovery forces Gianni into action. If an even older man like Maurizio can attract a beautiful woman like the tobacconist, why can't he?

In terms of rhythm, *The Salt of Life* is loose and unhurried. "It reflects a kind of Mediterranean indolence," says Di Gregorio. "Rome itself induces a certain slowness. Using longer takes, I wanted to give the actors as

much freedom as possible. They knew they had to say a certain line, but I left it up to them to say it in their own way and not to think too much about the screenplay."

Part of the film's charm comes from its music, which includes lively pizzicato strings alongside wistful accordion. "[Composers] Ratchev and Carratello started writing music before we started shooting," the director explains, "which was very useful because once we were on set I had a clear idea of what music would accompany certain scenes." The music is at its most effective when reflecting Gianni's melancholy – a sentiment that the director acknowledges is the "motor" of the film. "Again, it's a feeling I really identified with – this idea of the passing of time, the fear of ending up like one of those old men outside the bar."

The Salt of Life has been praised in Italy for offering a refreshing, more 'wholesome' image of the older Italian male than that promulgated by the country's 74-year-old prime minister – 'il cavaliere', as he's known. But this was something Di Gregorio insists he realised only after the film was completed: "I didn't think too much about Berlusconi during the shoot. But hopefully the film shows that in Italy, not all men are like him – that there are other ways of relating to, and appreciating, women."

■ *'The Salt of Life'* is released on 12 August, and is reviewed on page 74

● **David Mamet** is readying a film for HBO centred on Phil Spector's 2007 trial for the murder of actress Lana Clarkson. Mamet will direct from his own script, and has lined up Al Pacino to star as the disgraced record producer, with Helen Mirren replacing Bette Midler as Spector's defence attorney Linda Kenney Baden. Filming begins next year.

● **Michael Winterbottom** is planning a second series of *'The Trip'*, with stars Steve Coogan and Rob Brydon this time touring restaurants across Italy. Winterbottom is also set to direct Jack Black in a comedy entitled *'Bailout'*, and is reportedly also planning another collaboration with Coogan: *'Paul Raymond's Wonderful World of Erotica'*, about the infamous king of Soho's sex industry.

● **Charlie Kaufman** is reportedly teaming with director Spike Jonze again to pen an as-yet-untitled film rumoured to be "a satire about how world leaders gather to figure out all the seismic events that will take place in the world, from oil prices to wars that will be waged". Joaquin Phoenix is reportedly to star in the film, which begins shooting next March.

● **Julian Schnabel** is to follow the poorly received *'Miral'* with *'In the Hand of Dante'*, an adaptation of the novel by Nick Tosches. The film will reunite Schnabel with Johnny Depp, who starred in his 2000 film *'Before Night Falls'*. The story centres on Dante's *'The Divine Comedy'*, alternating between 14th-century Italy, where Dante is struggling to finish his poem, and present-day New York, where a Dante expert is caught up in danger when black-market traders ask him to authenticate an original manuscript of the work.

● **Spike Lee** is to remake Park Chan-Wook's 2003 hit *'Oldboy'*, and has reportedly lined up Josh Brolin to star as the man suddenly freed after being held

prisoner for 15 years for no apparent reason, who sets out to find those responsible. The remake's screenwriter Mark Protosevich (*'Thor'*) has said he is drawing for inspiration on both Park's film and its manga source by Minegishi Nobuaki and Tsuchiya Garon.



The facts of the apostles

Nick James crunches the numbers in the UK film industry's statistical yearbook

Just one year ago, when the British film world was a different place, I went to the launch of last year's edition of the UK Film Council's Statistical Yearbook. Seriously interested parties settled into a meeting room at Little Portland St for a low-key occasion, enlivened only by the questions about methodology and correctness put to the compilers of this well-established compendium of hard facts and analysis. It's almost a nostalgic memory because, before a week had passed, the UKFC had been told it was going to be abolished. Now the informational cornucopia that is the Statistical Yearbook finds its home – at least for the time being – with us at the BFI, and its latest 2011 edition is ready.

Stats concerning the film releases of 2010 (it's always the previous year that's analysed) have been brought together painstakingly from many sources and looked at from several telling perspectives. These conclusions, charts and graphs are primarily for people in and around the film business, and for academic study. But now



Out of balance: one huge box-office hit like 'Toy Story 3' can skew the figures

anyone can dip into them at: statisticalyearbook11.bfi.org.uk.

What fascinates me is the way the adaptable truths of numbers can recalibrate one's assumptions about the cinema. Take, for instance, the genre chart. It tells us that, while dramas make up 27 per cent of all releases, they account for only 5 per cent of the box office, whereas comedies amount to 21 per cent of releases, and provide 19 per cent of

takings. That contrast in returns puts into perspective claims that Hollywood is commissioning films purely in response to number crunching. Surely if that were the case, dramas would be fewer and farther between and comedies more abundant. But then again, animation looks an even better bet – 4.8 per cent of releases against 18.6 per cent of box office – until you realise that the odds are completely distorted

by one release: 2010's most successful film, *Toy Story 3*.

Other pieces of contextualisation are all the more salutary for being predictable. One of the points of contention this magazine had with the old UKFC's use of statistics for PR purposes was the way that US studio-backed films such as the Harry Potter and James Bond titles were always claimed as British successes, even though the lion's share of profits went back to the US studio. This makes a substantial difference: by the wider definition, UK films accounted for 24 per cent of the UK market, but that breaks down into 18.6 per cent for the studio-backed films and only 5.4 per cent for the UK indies.

Reading the report is like looking through a kaleidoscope; each time you twist, you get a different perspective. Most of all it's a bracing reminder not to graze too long in the fields of wishful thinking beneath the window of the ivory tower.

There is some question as to the future funding of the yearbook, which has been transferred to the BFI with no funds attached, but I hope a solution can be found. The rude pleasure of having one's preconceptions kicked about a bit by the facts should never be underestimated.

THE NUMBERS

Tending 'The Tree of Life'

A speedy post-Cannes release of Terrence Malick's *Palme d'Or* winner has paid dividends, says **Charles Gant**

Distributing and marketing arthouse films poses many challenges, but the one resource that's rarely in short supply is time. The gap between acquisition and release can be as much as a year, giving distributors every opportunity to prepare their precious picture for survival in the brutal market.

Not so in the case of *The Tree of Life*. Having lost its UK distributor shortly before Cannes, it wasn't until early June that the rights to Terrence Malick's *Palme d'Or* winner were assigned to Fox Searchlight, the film's US partner. Only four weeks later, the picture arrived in UK cinemas.

The 8 July release date had its downsides, explains Searchlight UK boss Kate Gardiner, including the loss

of "trailing opportunities" and long-lead press. The dating decision was driven by a desire to "strike while the iron's hot", exploiting the huge buzz generated by Cannes and the *Palme d'Or* win. Crucially, sites in the key Picturehouse and Curzon chains were available, whereas later in the year the arthouses had made commitments to other films. And by opting for the weekend dubbed by Gardiner "the *Transformers*/*Harry Potter* sandwich", the film won itself a date that was "incredibly clear", with virtually no competition at all.

Compiling – the process whereby a distributor plans a release by looking at the prior performance of comparative titles, cinema by cinema – was, says Gardiner, "really, really difficult, but then most truly interesting films are hard to comp. *The Tree of Life* is defiantly arthouse, but with big stars and a big world. It's like nothing you'll ever see." In the end, Searchlight looked at previous

titles such as *A Single Man* and *The Assassination of Jesse James* – and then released *The Tree of Life* on an almost identical number of screens to Malick's last film *The New World*.

Results were at the high end of expectations. *The Tree of Life* opened with £406,000 from 75 screens, which compares favourably with *The New World*'s £118,000 from 77 screens. The number is, unsurprisingly, far in excess of the debuts of recent *Palme d'Or* winners such as *The White Ribbon* (£72,000) and *The Class* (£138,000). Less predictably, it also exceeds 2006's *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, where stonking Irish takings boosted its opening to £391,000 from 105 cinemas. (Official UK box-office data includes Ireland.)

As *Sight & Sound* went to press, a clear picture of *The Tree of Life*'s longevity at the box office had yet to emerge. With anecdotal reports of walkouts, not every audience

Palme d'Or winners at the UK box office 2002-11

Film	Year	Gross
<i>Fahrenheit 9/11</i>	2004	£6,545,552
<i>The Wind That Shakes the Barley</i>	2006	£3,906,755
<i>The Pianist</i>	2002	£2,972,334
<i>The Tree of Life</i>	2011	£923,161*
<i>The Class</i>	2008	£888,967
<i>The White Ribbon</i>	2009	£657,896
<i>Elephant</i>	2003	£429,807
<i>4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days</i>	2007	£300,987
<i>The Child</i>	2005	£125,455
<i>Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives</i>	2010	£122,484

* Gross after 10 days

member has evidently shared the wild enthusiasm of the critics.

"We absolutely at no point tried to mis-sell the film," says Gardiner. "The people who know Malick have an inkling what to expect. When it comes to communicating the special nature of the film, there's only so much you can do."

Desert heat

David Thompson remembers his youthful discovery of 'Station Six Sahara' and the unfulfilled promise of its director, Seth Holt

We probably all remember movies from our childhood that marked us in some way. One shot from one film has never left me: a near-naked Carroll Baker sitting in a chair in the middle of a desert, watched by a group of heavily perspiring men. The all-important detail was that her bra straps were hanging down her arms. I must have been about 11 or 12 when I saw it. Need I say more?

I'm certain I saw this particular film on television. Somehow I eventually discovered that it was none other than *Station Six Sahara*, a British-German co-production first released in 1963. I remembered little of the film except for this one provocative image (though that almost seemed enough). But when would I be able to see it again?

Cut to 1986, when I had the opportunity to programme my first season at the National Film Theatre, a complete Martin Scorsese retrospective. To spice it up, I added films that had influenced him, as well as throwing in a few titles he had included in that entertaining 'Guilty Pleasures' column in *Film Comment* magazine. Happily for me, among them was *Station Six Sahara*. As Scorsese wrote: "Here you get that palpable sense of being in a place – stuck in a place. And you learn what it's like in a society of people who live on the outside. Way on the outside."

The film all takes place on an oil station somewhere in the Sahara (it was actually shot close to Tripoli), where the pumps are manned by a motley crew. We're introduced to them as a newcomer arrives – a taciturn, self-disciplined German (Hansjörg Felmy). Ominously, he's driven to the station in a truck that also carries the coffin in which his predecessor will be taken away. Once there, he encounters a raucous, ribald Scot (Ian Bannen), an uptight, snobbish English former army major (Denholm Elliott) and a shy, uncommunicative Spaniard (Mario Adorf). All are under the thumb of their boss (Peter van Eyck), a proud, isolated figure who prefers to keep himself apart from the others in order to maintain his authority.

So far, so sweaty, with the Scot tormenting the major at every opportunity, and a tense night-time poker game threatening to usher in the film's first real burst of violence.



Queen of the desert: Carroll Baker, star of Seth Holt's 'Station Six Sahara'

But just at that moment, a bizarre event disrupts this uneasy community. An open-top Cadillac bolts through the station and hits a wall. Its occupants are a man and his blonde female companion (in fact his ex-wife), who is miraculously unscathed by the crash. As he makes a slow recovery from his injuries, she – in the form of Carroll Baker, star of Kazan's *Baby Doll* (1956) – stalks around the station with a catlike grace, while the resident toms become highly agitated by her presence. It's then simply a matter of who among them will make the first advances, and who she will pick for her pleasure. I won't reveal more except to say it all ends unhappily... sort of.

Station Six Sahara was based on a stage play, and scripted by Bryan Forbes and Brian Clemens. Among the credits are two names familiar from Roman Polanski's British

I remembered little of the film except for this one provocative image

productions, producer Gene Gutowski and editor Alastair McIntyre, and in many ways it's akin to the Polish master's early tales of perversion and imposition. But the significant figure is the film's director, Seth Holt. Look up Holt in any film dictionary and you will find the same story: one of great promise unfulfilled, and of a significant loss to the burgeoning British film industry of the 1960s.

Born in 1924, Holt began his adult life as an actor before being drawn into documentaries as an assistant editor. He was introduced to Ealing Studios by his brother-in-law Robert

Hamer, graduating to editor on 1951's *The Lavender Hill Mob* (among other titles) and producer on *The Ladykillers* (1955). He made the leap to director on one of Ealing's last films, the prophetically titled *Nowhere to Go* (1958). Co-scripted by Kenneth Tynan, and featuring the film debut of Maggie Smith, it's a cool, supremely visual thriller that in terms of its minimal dialogue and daring narrative playfulness is closer to the world of Jean-Pierre Melville than to any British precedents.

After serving a period as an editing doctor, in which capacity he was by some accounts responsible for saving *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960) and *The Entertainer* (1960), Holt re-emerged as a director for Hammer with the excellent *Les Diaboliques* rip-off *Taste of Fear* (1961) and the creepy Bette Davis vehicle *The Nanny* (1965). But barren years were to follow, as Holt's alcoholism resulted in his death in 1971 while shooting his final film: another Hammer production, *Blood from the Mummy's Tomb*.

Was that sense of what might have been – and *Movie* magazine's championing of Holt as one of the finest British talents around – justified? Certainly, most of his films were genre pieces, as opposed to self-generated works, and none could be regarded as a masterpiece. But as *Station Six Sahara* demonstrates, he had a remarkable gift for conjuring atmosphere, combined with an astute direction of actors (all are excellent) and a masterly use of montage. Sound alone is brilliantly used throughout, from the monotonous throb of the pumps to the whining crescendo of the Cadillac's horn before the crash.

Contemporary reviewers acknowledged all of this: *The Times* commented that "for once in a British film some real erotic tension is palpable on the screen", while Dilys Powell described the film as "true cinema". However, all the critics were troubled by the total lack of explanation of the car's sudden appearance in such a remote spot. Holt's response: "I refuse to countenance any justification. It was a little coincidence. If people think of these things, then they don't like the picture."

As it happens, Holt's favourite director was Buñuel, and personally I like to see this conceit as one of those surrealist coups so beloved by the wily Spaniard. The coffin on the truck is another highly Buñuelian detail. Frustratingly, right now you'd be hard pressed to find a copy of *Station Six Sahara* to check whether or not you agree with me.

What the papers said

"Seth Holt... make[s] the most of a silly story, not by trying discreetly to muffle its clichés, but by playing up to them. No pretence of subtlety, no explanations... but at least this is filming with the courage of its own clichés."

'MFB', October 1963

"With all due respect to the high-visibility charms of Carroll Baker, 'Station Six Sahara' is better without her. The first half-hour

or so has real possibilities as a cynical, corrosive close-up of desert boredom and unleashed, petty frictions. Enter Miss Baker in a random car crash, and... what started as murderous irony soon turns into a steamy farce that couldn't matter less."
Howard Thompson, 'The New York Times', November 1964



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Express yourself

The Turner Prize-winning artist Gillian Wearing talks to **Helen de Witt** about her feature-film debut 'Self Made'

In 2007 the UK Film Council invited a number of British artists to submit proposals to make a feature-length film. One of them was Turner Prize winner Gillian Wearing. The result is her first feature *Self Made*, an emotional and sometimes disturbing expedition into the psyche of seven people as they encounter their deepest, darkest selves through Method acting. Individuals from different walks of life are seen working through improvisations and rehearsals in workshops, watched over by an acting tutor, each developing a short film based on their own experiences. By exploring their fictional selves they create scenarios – or “end scenes” – in which those character aspects are brought to life.

Wearing – who has previously directed short films and video pieces including *Confess All on Video. Don't Worry. You Will Be in Disguise. Intrigued? Call Gillian* (1994), *10-16* (1997), *2 into 1* (1997) and *Family History* (2006) – says she was comfortable with the idea of a longer film: “Once you work in moving image it's very hard not to think that you want to engage with the cinema... I did feel like an artist making my film, though the film is for a cinema not an art gallery. A gallery is a blank space and you have to create an environment, whereas with a cinema you go into an already created environment. I prefer to do shorter things in a gallery – they still have an arc, but people know how long they are and can walk in and walk out.

“I'm quite happy not to classify [*Self Made*],” she continues. “It is a hybrid. You can't call it a straightforward documentary or fiction film. You move between those forms.”

To find participants for the film, she put adverts on audition websites, in newspapers and in *Time Out* – and received thousands of replies. The adverts read: “Would you like to be in a film? You can play yourself or a fictional character. Call Gillian.” “The idea started with the title *Self Made*,” she recalls. “I was asked to make a film, so I thought it would be quite interesting if I asked other people to make a film too. I was putting out a proposal too – doing a similar process to the Film Council.”

After lengthy auditions, 12 people were whittled down to seven, and once final funding from Northern



Film and Media was in place, the procedure began. “At that point I hadn't thought about it comprising individual films,” she says. “I'd come up with a scenario to have everyone in one scene and I'd worked with [scriptwriter] Leo Butler to come up with one story. But I'd chosen people with very strong characters, and found that putting lots of strong characters together in one story doesn't really work.”

Wearing says she was attracted to Method acting because “it is about emotional truth and allowing yourself and your body to be truthful, so you can ultimately be truthful with your character”. To this end she started to research the Method technique, enrolling in classes, through which she found acting teacher Sam Rumbelow. Once he was on board they worked in close collaboration, with Wearing writing fictional end scenes after Rumbelow's workshops had developed the participants' fictional selves.

“When Leo and I wrote some workshop sequences for a trial run of *Self Made*, they turned out very fictional,” she explains, “and Sam would come along and say that you've got to relate them to the person – you need to look to people's needs as well as to the [fictional] characters in the process. Some of the workshops were written very well, but they wouldn't work in reality. So Sam came on board to write some of the workshops up for the final film.”

Lesley, who has always had a yearning for old-world values, has a black-and-white rural-set film in 1940s style

There are stark stylistic contrasts between the filming of the workshops and the end scenes, as the latter create a specific environment for each participant's character. As a result, each end scene has its own distinctive style and setting. For Lian, one of the participants, who has issues with her negligent father, Wearing created a version of the scene from *King Lear* in which Lear seeks a declaration of love from his three daughters. (Lian, of course, plays Cordelia.) Lesley, who has always had a yearning for old-world values, has a black-and-white rural-set

film in 1940s style. Asheq, whose alter ego is one of the most disturbing, has a violent scenario filmed in the style of Alan Clarke.

The scenes exemplify the Method process, as Wearing explains. “Method acting asks the person to draw on their past experiences to bring their character to life. You're slipping between these two states of real and fiction.” One powerful aspect of the process was seeing how affected the participants were. For some, like Lian, it helped them deal with long-standing issues; for Asheq, it led to a change in direction and he's



Call Gillian: Turner Prize winner Wearing advertised for participants in 'Self Made'

A gap in the market

now training to be an actor. It was also a very intense experience for Wearing herself. "I couldn't remain detached – it was very emotional," she recalls. "Every night I was so exhausted from empathising from the outside, looking in."

One thing she hopes the film does is to invite the audience to think about themselves as a character. "If you were given the opportunity to think of a character, what would that be?" she says. "Every choice we ever make in life says something about us. When you're working with people who aren't famous, how an audience is able to be involved with that person is interesting. What I was amazed about when I was watching it being screened is how strongly you are affected by it... It takes people on this journey with them."

Wearing's work has sometimes been compared with reality television, but her investigations into people's real and desired lives started long before that genre hit big on the small screen. "My very early influence was *7 Up*," she says. "I've always loved documentaries rather than drama. They showed you the big gulf between reality and fiction. Fiction was pretty staid in those days. I'd been working ten years before *Big Brother*. The first series of *Big Brother* was pretty amazing as it did something like *7 Up* did: show you the world we live in and how we really do interact with each other... What reality television has definitely given the world is that it's changed drama forever. It's made us get closer to how reality is framed and performed, and how people really interact with each other. I've also noticed that acting has improved since reality television – actually since the advent of the camcorder."

SelfMade provided an opportunity for a number of individuals to put themselves into a film, not in an idealised way, but in order to find, capture and control parts of themselves they found hard to relate to. As a result, watching *SelfMade* is a raw and sometimes painful process – but all the more truthful for it. Wearing's film shows us that acting is not always about artifice, but instead can provide greater honesty.

"Creativity is a great way to express things that you don't want to literally express," she says. "There is more to life than going through the motions of living. Everyone has that grassroots yearning to express the bigger reason why we are here, and creativity is one way that everyone can do that."

■ *'SelfMade'* is released on 2 September

For Herschell Gordon Lewis, gore was just another business opportunity, he tells Geoffrey Macnab

Now in his early eighties (he was born in 1929), 'Godfather of Gore' Herschell Gordon Lewis is a dapper silver-haired figure. Attending the Neuchâtel International Fantastic Film Festival in Switzerland, he looks little different from other affluent, semi-retired Americans on holiday in Europe. Well-spoken and courteous, this former English-literature professor certainly doesn't live up to his nickname. But alongside his more conventional career in teaching, marketing and advertising, he was a pioneer in what came to be called 'splatter movies.' His films – among them *'Blood Feast'* (1963), *'Two Thousand Maniacs!'* (1964) and *'The Gore Gore Girls'* (1972) – still enjoy cult status among horror fans.

Lewis always saw exploitation movies primarily as an economic opportunity. Back in the 1950s, when he was working in advertising in Chicago after leaving academia, he bought a half share in what became the film company Lewis and Martin. "Immediately a problem came forward," he recalls. "We had only 16mm equipment. The big advertising agencies wanted to shoot in 35mm." In a bid to compete with the California-based agencies, Lewis and Martin invested in their own 35mm equipment, but business remained patchy. An acquaintance asked him why he didn't shoot feature films instead. "That, of course, is a stupid question," he comments. "It's like, 'Why aren't you rich?'"

Even so, Lewis took the plunge, forming a new company, Mid-Continent Films. His first production *'The Prime Time'* (1959) was by his own account a disaster. "I hired a director – a big mistake!" he says. "This fellow was very good at lighting beer cans, which was what Chicago directors were doing. But to have an actor perform a role – that was beyond him."

His next project *'Living Venus'* (1961) fared little better. The distributors went bankrupt, owing Lewis a substantial sum of money. "That was the first of a number of mid-life crises I survived," he comments. It was at this point that he was approached by David Friedman, a young entrepreneur from the bankrupt distributors. "He said there's a distributor in Dallas, Texas,



"You know what they do in that movie?": the notorious scene in *'Blood Feast'*

who if we make one reel of pretty girls jumping around in the sun, will give us \$7000," Lewis recalls.

They calculated they could hire girls for \$50 a day; Lewis could cut the film himself and compose the music. At this point, a salesman for a film lab made him a proposition: if they made the movie at least 70 minutes long (the minimum length for an opening feature in a drive-in), he agreed to waive the lab costs until 90 days after delivery of the print. Thus, with minimal upfront expense, was born *'The Adventures Of Lucky Pierre'* (1961), about a man who imagines every woman he sees is naked. Lewis boasts that he shot the entire movie without any second takes.

The film went on to break box-office records. In fact, Lewis became a victim of his own success when a flood of low-budget nude exploitation films filled the market, causing his profit margins to shrink. "That was when I said, 'What other kind of movie might there be that the major film companies either will not make or cannot make?'" he remembers. "Out of the heavens came this marvellous four-letter word: gore."

By his own admission, Lewis's foray into horror was entirely opportunistic. He headed towards the genre simply because softcore films were no longer commercially viable. Then, when the big studios started making his "kind of movie" in the early 1970s, he withdrew from the fray to concentrate on his other career as a direct-marketing guru (he has written 32 books on the subject). "My influences were strictly financial rather than artistic," he insists. "I pity anybody who takes a different point of view. I know people who regard themselves as auteurs. I don't."

By turning to horror with *'Blood Feast'*, Lewis was able to offer audiences something they couldn't get from Hollywood, as he explains: "I had nothing going for me except the hope that someone would say, 'You have to see this. You know what they do in that movie? They pull a tongue out of a girl's mouth!' They wouldn't say, 'You've never seen less talented people in a movie.' They would say, 'Did you see that?'"

The Godfather of Gore was not an Ed Wood-type maverick with a love of carnival and a passion for filmmaking. He was a businessman filling a gap in the market, who kept costs low by taking as many production roles as he could himself.

You guess that Lewis's cynicism about the film business is to some extent affected. He talks with passion about his old movies, and still hopes to make further horror films. (He has a new script called *'Mr Bruce and the Gore Machine'*.) Lewis embraced a style of filmmaking in which the grand guignol elements and bloodletting were absolutely foregrounded.

The Neuchâtel Festival's gore retrospective placed him in a tradition that led eventually to the work of David Cronenberg, Sam Raimi and Peter Jackson. But Lewis is at pains to point out that the violence in his films is stylised, and audiences should always be aware it's not for real.

Whatever the extent of his influence, Lewis has certainly carved himself a niche in the history of horror and exploitation – and apparently he's very highly regarded in the world of direct marketing too.

■ Herschell Gordon Lewis's *'The Blood Trilogy'* is released on Blu-ray on 27 September

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Personal space

For over 30 years John Smith has been wryly documenting the world by dissecting it on film and video. Nick Bradshaw welcomes a first DVD release

I'm looking at a handsomely produced triptych of digipak DVD cases – coloured in the red-green-blue scheme of the RGB video colour model – hosting what I believe to be the first digital collection of John Smith's unassumingly masterful, irresistibly experimental film and video eye-openers. The DVDs are making me feel old, and a bit sad: a few years ago I'd have been thrilled to have acquired a digest (and, I suppose, a trophy) of what I consider some of the most playfully revealing explorations in the film form. Just lately, though – faced with a cellar freighted with so many boxes of DVDs it could be mistaken for a priest hole – I've embarked on one of those personal pull-back shots that strip away the promise of use-value from a given medium and consign it to the coffee coasters of antiquity. What fate lies in store for the shiny optical disc? How will it compare to the discarded, billowing audio-cassette tapes seen in *Lost Sound*, Smith's 1998-2001 archaeological film dig around East London with the sound artist Graeme Miller?

Smith's films combine that sense of wistful, high-on maudlin nostalgia – for matters of far more human salience than the mere fate of physical media – with a dazzlingly nonchalant ability to transcend the prosaically personal. (As he's quoted as saying in the accompanying booklet, "Basically, you're starting with your navel and then moving out from that.") It's no coincidence that this strain has grown more pronounced in his work as he has aged: his early pun films – on this set, *Associations* (1975), *The Girl Chewing Gum* (1976) or *Om* (1986) – foreground the invention, irony and formalist derring-do that Smith has certainly never lost. (The film-school text movie *The Girl Chewing Gum*, with its comical, seductive over-narration of documentary street footage, makes you want to watch directed bombast like *Transformers* with a DVD-commentary overlay of the wild track of Michael Bay's on-set direction.) Yet you can read the recurrent melancholia in some of his other titles: *Blight* (1994-96), *Regression* (1998-99), *Lost Sound*, *The Waste Land* (1999), *Frozen War* (2001), *Worst Case Scenario* (2001-03), *Museum Piece* (2004)... Diverse though they are in



Artisan essayist: Smith in 'Regression'



'The Black Tower'

their content, the collected films conjure a tone somewhere between the convivial banter of the pub and the lonely walk home.

The collection's first disc closes tellingly with *Regression*, an attempt to improve an earlier distillation of time – Smith's sequential daily performances of 'The 12 Days of Christmas' in 7P (1978). The later work notably sees the filmmaker appear on camera to give a lengthy disquisition on his switch to video-making and his (unlikely) hopes of being mistaken for a Young British Artist. It follows *Shepherd's Delight* (1980-84) and *The Black Tower* (1985-87), which tease with putatively autobiographical hints of drink and breakdown. ("A literal reading of all of his films' narratives," Gemma Lloyd and Gareth Bell-Jones have noted, "would lead one to presume John Smith is an alcoholic with mental health problems.")

That sense of pulling back marks the second disc. The pithy *Gargantuan* (1992, one minute, one newt) and *The Kiss* (1999, five minutes, one hothouse lily) riff on shifts of scale, perspective and comprehension.

The films have that enviable simplicity of a master and an exemplary economy of means



'Lost Sound'



'Blight'

Blight, an exquisitely edited protest musical (in collaboration with composer Jocelyn Pook) shot during the demolition of Smith's Leytonstone neighbourhood to make way for the M11, turns the received meaning of 'urban blight' on its head. *Slow Glass* (1988-91) is a dense, contemplative masterwork that turns an erstwhile glazier's pub ruminations on the production and consumption of glass ("still a liquid... moving, trickling down, just too slow to see") into a fractured meditation on the sands of time, urban change and the act of seeing. Conversely, perhaps, *The Waste Land* pulls T.S. Eliot back to the bar for last orders and a glimpse of his anagrammed name as he exits the toilet.t.s. (*Shepherd's Delight* features similar word games with the Vacant/Engaged labels on sliding door locks, while *Home Suite* (1993-94) – absent from this set – reflects at length on the bowl of his old loo. Smith elevates the art of toilet humour.)

The third disc gathers Smith's 'Hotel Diaries' (2001-07), his major project from the Bush/Blair decade. Pushing (himself) into stark, unedited, single-shot performance terrain, these are eight intimate video diaries – or as Ian Christie calls them, nocturnes – taped in sundry hotel rooms around the world. Smith's handheld camera scans his confines in search of telling images, while his monologues make strange connections between his daily circumstances and news – initially mediated – from Afghanistan, Iraq

and occupied Palestine. (The penultimate piece, 2007's *Dirty Pictures*, features both Israel's West Bank wall and a hotel ceiling that's less steadfast than you'd guess.) As ever, the films have that enviable simplicity of a master, not to mention an exemplary economy of means; they demonstrate how to surmount one's isolation, even if it leads you straight to larger geopolitical frustrations.

Last year the Royal College of Art, Smith's alma mater, mounted a rare solo retrospective of his work. Inevitably, that showcased some pieces not on these discs – those repurposed as installations, like *Blue Bathroom* (1978-79), but also early films such as *Leading Light* (1975) or *Hackney Marshes* (1977) that are involved, as Smith noted, with the materiality of film (you can read an interview I conducted with him then on the S&S website at www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/exclusive/john_smith). His website lists 44 movie works up to last year's *Flag Mountain*. You can now take nearly half of them with you, but the rest will remain fleeting graces.

Reading about Smith for this piece, I've found Adrian Danks comparing him to the great playful/artisanal film essayists such as Agnès Varda, Chris Marker, Patrick Keiller and Corinne and Arthur Cantrill (not to mention his fellow dialectician Jean-Luc Godard). Michael O'Pray casts him with the cinema's "outstanding practitioners of humour" – Buster Keaton, Luis Buñuel, the Marx Brothers, Jacques Tati – "all of whom pushed or unpicked the logic of the medium itself through humour."

Thinking about Smith's attempts to address and bridge the gulf between illusionism and formalism, film's form and content, I'm reminded of the great avant-garde filmmaker Nathaniel Dorsky and the observations in his monograph *Devotional Cinema* on what he calls the age-old "instinct to express the union of material and subject". And film, he notes, can be a direct metaphor for our existence as temporal, perceiving beings.

"The more we are able to relax and accept the absolute presence of our situation and then begin to recognise its formal qualities," he writes, "the greater the chance we have to transmute it. With humility, we can perform an act of alchemy and transform what might feel like leaden claustrophobia into an expression of openness and clarity."

■ The three-DVD box-set 'John Smith' is available now from Lux

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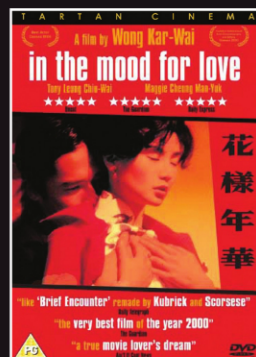
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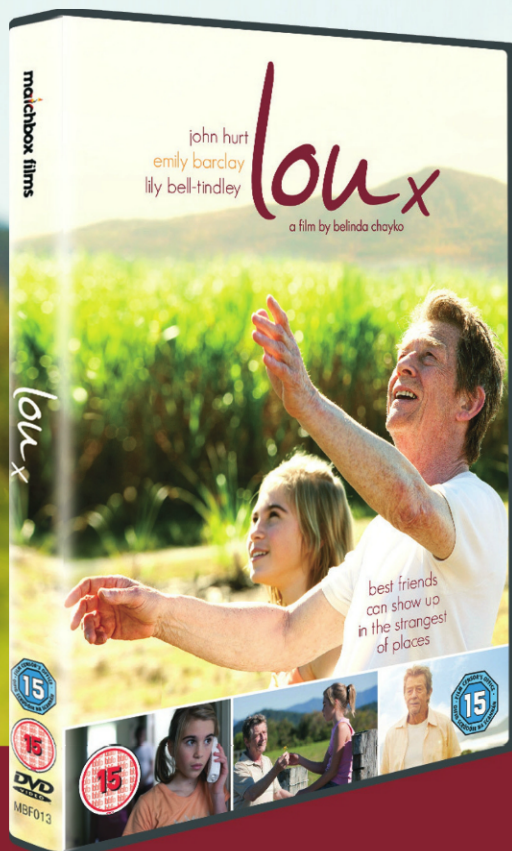
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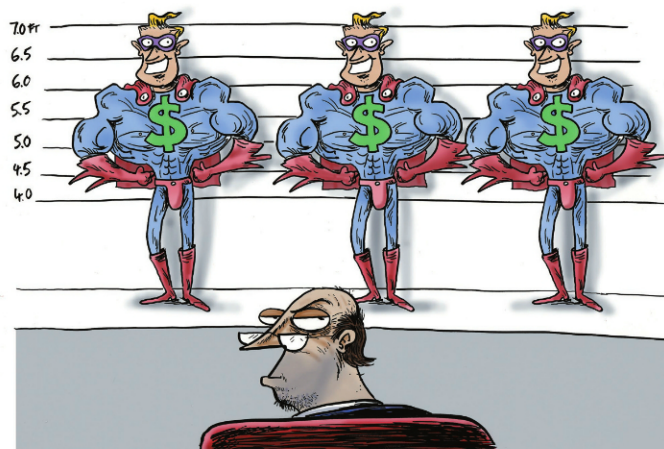
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Slave to the algorithm

Algorithms, which increasingly rule our lives, are pretty reductive things. A couple of days ago, I got a nice little email. "Greetings from Amazon.co.uk," it began, somewhat impersonally. "Customers who have purchased or rated the Werner Herzog Box-set 1 might like to know that Big Momma's Collection will soon be released." Obvious, really: nothing makes up for the loss of Klaus Kinski quite like Martin Lawrence in a fat suit. Later the same morning, I got another one. "Customers who purchased or rated The Agnès Varda Collection Vol. 2 might like to know that the Sylvester Stallone Box-set is now available." Same subtle synergy: *Vagabond* is really just *Rocky* for girls. What better to watch just after *The Gleaners and I* than *Judge Dredd*?

From the above, it's clear Amazon hasn't quite got my bearings yet. We're obviously still some way away from the world depicted in *Minority Report*, in which Tom Cruise has only to enter a mall and commercials tailored precisely to his recent purchases pop up before his eyes. But Amazon is doing its damndest: if the algorithms that makes it try to sell me a weekend's worth of Sly are crude – the key concept, in case you haven't worked it out, is 'box-sets' (suggesting that they have at least spotted my completist tendencies) – they are entirely consistent with the way of today's world. At its most basic, the Google algorithm pairs information on the request you've just fed into the search engine with what that engine already knows about your hopes and desires (which is probably a great deal more than you know yourself, or at best more than you would be prepared to admit) and comes up with a list.

We are so used to being able to call up information in this way that we have lost sight of the near-miraculous volume of data and speed of delivery involved (Google was able to find me 40 million-plus results on 'Google algorithm' in 0.11 seconds). But what we have also lost sight of is the fact that it relies on repetition – on meeting the same needs as closely as possible without pushing out into other areas. If I read a book about algorithms (which, of course, Amazon would love to help me find: a quick check yields 87,536 possibilities), I might learn more about related subjects. With a search engine, however, I will be kept within safe walls. I may learn more than I need to know about some things, but there is little chance I will learn



When the first Superman movie came out in 1978, it was a genuine oddity; now, the Caped Ones hunt in packs

anything about something else. It's like the long-tail theory in reverse: the short-colon theory, perhaps. Welcome to the Age of More of the Same. Which is pretty much how Hollywood works these days – or would like to work if it could develop an algorithm. From being an industry whose hunger for product resulted in great diversity, it has become an industry whose thirst for profit has resulted in a narrow range of sameness. For diversity, read sustainability. And sustainability – which, as regular readers may have noticed, is not my favourite word – is best achieved by more of the same.

The development of Hollywood during its golden era – the 1930s, over which the grip of the Great Depression only slowly loosened – soon solidified into a system where the studios created product to be shown in the cinemas they owned. Such was demand that the nature of that product was of almost secondary importance. People went to the movies once or twice a week and saw what came up on the screen. Sure, they liked some movies more than others, but the choice was limited – major cities had five or six first-run cinemas; smaller towns one or two – and the habit was ingrained. For the studio system of the 1930s, a regular flow was the important thing; the quality of the product was secondary – which, paradoxically, was why the quality was so high. Within a well-oiled set-up, production chiefs, producers and directors had the freedom to do what they liked.

Roll forward three-quarters of a century and you have something very

different: a hard industrial core – the remaining studios – producing only megamovies that are as much like last week's megamovies as possible. These are known in the business as tentpoles and they sustain the summer release schedule by attracting a four-quadrant audience (men and women, older and younger). This is often dismissed as dumbing down, but in fact it is more about broadening out. Kids' cartoons need to have jokes for adults; action movies need to have plots that younger kids can understand; everything has to have lots of CGI and be in 3D. Niche audiences are so last-century; nowadays, all movies have to deliver across the entire range. In a much less sophisticated way than the Google algorithm, the elements that are proving successful in this week's movies are repackaged for next year's, and we end up with No. 47 bus syndrome: you can go for years without seeing a vampire movie, and then three come along at once. Or take superheroes. When the first Superman movie came out in 1978, it was a genuine oddity (and, of course, a bit of a risk); now, the Caped Ones hunt in packs. Market research is dedicated to identifying what audiences want; the entertainment industry is dedicated to producing more of the same. We might as well all live, *Tron*-like, in Google's virtual world. But if we have to, at least it's a world from which we can dream that, perhaps, one day, Amazon might note I had bought an Arnold Schwarzenegger box-set and think I "might like to know" about an Alain Resnais collection. ♦♦ Nick Roddick

● **FrightFest** has established itself as the premier horror festival in the UK. This year's event hosts ten premieres of British titles, including Ben Wheatley's highly rated 'Kill List' (see feature on page 28) and Robin Hardy's 'The Wicker Tree', described as a "companion piece" to 'The Wicker Man'. From America comes 'Tucker & Dale Vs. Evil', and among the films in the Discovery strand is the Swedish feature 'Blood Runs Cold'. Empire Cinema, Leicester Square, London, 25-29 August.

● **Il Cinema Ritrovato DVD Awards**, which are held each year at the festival in Bologna, this year awarded the Filmoteca de Catalunya's 'Segundo de Chomón 1903-1912' box-set their DVD of the year prize. Other prizewinners included Criterion's edition of 'The Night of the Hunter', which took the Best Special Features prize; the 'Orphans 7 – A Film Symposium' box-set, which was awarded Most Original Contribution to Film History; the Edition Filmmuseum's 'Max Davidson Comedies' and 'Female Comedy Teams' DVDs, which were jointly awarded the prize for Best Rediscovery of a Forgotten Film; and Criterion's 'America Lost and Found: The BBS Story', which won Best Blu-ray.

● **Sound of Fear: The Musical Universe of Horror** is an event exploring the use of music and sound design in horror films. Among a number of musical performances is one from John Carpenter's soundtrack collaborator Alan Howarth. Carpenter himself has pre-recorded an interview with critic Simon Reynolds, in which he discusses the music in his films. The event also hosts a discussion with a panel including 'S&S' contributors Kim Newman and Stephen Thrower. South Bank Centre, London, 3 September.



● **The London Comedy Film Festival** has a special focus on body-swap comedies, from Tom Hanks in 'Big' (above), 'Being John Malkovich', Dustin Hoffman in 'Tootsie' and Steve Martin and Lily Tomlin in 'All of Me'. Each screening is followed by a cabaret performance. Wilton's Music Hall, London, 8-12 August.

For Pedro Almodóvar, 'The Skin I Live In' marks not just a bold excursion into horror, but a return to old obsessions. He talks to **Maria Delgado**, while overleaf **Kim Newman** and **Paul Julian Smith** untangle the film's web of references

FLESH AND THE DEVIL

For Pedro Almodóvar, filmmaking has never been about sticking to the rule book. In fact his blend of genres is so eclectic that the late Cuban writer Gabriel Cabrera Infante coined a new term to describe it: "Almodrama". For his 18th feature *The Skin I Live In* (*La piel que habito*), the Spanish auteur has turned to the late French crime novelist Thierry Jonquet's 1984 novella *Tarantula*, replacing the pot-boiling sensationalism and trash aesthetics of the original with a more austere and menacing narrative – a brand of horror bereft of gore, with elements of melodrama, *noir*, sci-fi and black humour thrown into the mix. As with the director's 1997 adaptation of Ruth Rendell's *Live Flesh*, the core narrative is significantly reworked, with characters barely recognisable from the original novel.

The Skin I Live In also marks the return to the fold of one of Almodóvar's key early collaborators, Antonio Banderas. But he's no longer the fresh-faced boy of *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (*Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*, 1988), nor even the disturbed psychiatric patient of *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* (*¡Átame!*, 1989). Here, Banderas's Robert Ledgard is a suave, successful, middle-aged plastic surgeon whose mortality (the ➡





THE ARTIST AND HIS CREATION
Pedro Almodóvar, right, cast Elena Anaya, left,
in the key role of Vera in 'The Skin I Live In', after
giving her a small role in 2002's 'Talk to Her'

◀ camera repeatedly lingers on his greying hair and leathery face) is contrasted with the porcelain perfection of the artificial skin he has created for the patient – the knowingly named Vera Cruz (Elena Anaya) – he keeps imprisoned in El Cigarral (The Cicada), his palatial house-cum-clinic on the outskirts of Toledo.

Another Almodóvar regular, Marisa Paredes (last seen in 2002's *Talk to Her/Hable con ella*), plays Ledgard's housekeeper and accomplice Marilia, who has her own secrets: the surgeon is her illegitimate son, and she has another son, Zeca (Roberto Alamo), with a criminal past and wayward intentions. There are elements of the Cain and Abel story in Ledgard's relationship with the brutish Zeca, who is first seen dressed in carnival costume as a tiger. Multiple skeletons rattle in the family closet, and when Ledgard fears his disturbed daughter (Blanca Suárez) has been abused by Vicente (Jan Cornet), an engaging young man she meets at a wedding, he exacts his revenge.

As with *Volver* (2005) and *Broken Embraces (Los abrazos rotos)* (2009), intersecting narrative strands are woven together with consummate skill in the film's final third. Issues of transgendered identity and body morphology provide a link with earlier Almodóvar films like *Law of Desire (La Ley del deseo)* (1986) and *All About My Mother (Todo sobre mi madre)* (1999). Red remains a prominent visual motif – from carmine lipstick to drops of blood on a glass plate; and from a crimson jumper to a ruby bedspread – and cinematic references abound. Perhaps more than any of the director's previous works, *The Skin I Live In* also celebrates art's capacity to offer a space for emotional enrichment and personal salvation in the bleakest of circumstances.

Maria Delgado: 'The Skin I Live In' is very different from Thierry Jonquet's source novella, 'Tarantula'.

Pedro Almodóvar: There was a situation in the book that I was interested in, and that's the magnitude of the doctor's revenge against the man he thinks has raped his daughter. When I started to work on the adaptation, in order to develop this central concern, I had to reshape much of the book to provide a situation that was plausible. Literature or theatre allow you to skim over particular things – they allow a suspension of disbelief. But this just isn't possible in film.

I spent ten years returning to and refining the screenplay, because I just didn't think it was ready. In the case of both the novels I've adapted for film, the process has in many ways been longer and more laborious than working on an original screenplay. I never felt tied to the novel – it was more of a creative inspiration. So those who know the book should see the film as something independent – indeed, each has a different title.

Revenge is now an excuse for Robert Ledgard – a means for him to continue his work on transgenesis [the transfer of cloned genetic material from one species or breed to another]. And in order to be able to do this, he needs an accomplice. This is why I created the character of Marilia, who doesn't exist in the novel.

MD: Your brother Agustín, who produces your films, is credited as co-screenwriter on this one.

PA: My brother helps me on everything. He's the producer of my films, of course, but when I begin work on a new project he's the best archivist I can

'I didn't want [Antonio's] character to be a typical baddie. I wanted him to look like a gentleman'

turn to, because he's got such an amazing memory and mind. He's like a walking encyclopedia. So when I decided – and this is also not in the book, but is fundamental to the film – that Ledgard is working on the cultivation of a new skin, it felt at first a little like science fiction. But then my brother began to talk to me about transgenesis and genetically modified organisms, and we talked to doctors working in this area. It was Agustín who really invented this key thread of the film.

When we were shooting the film, it came to light that there was a laboratory in Spain, in Granada, which is cultivating artificial skin. The advances in this field over the ten years that I've been developing *The Skin I Live In* have been incredible. So while I designed Ledgard's basement laboratory – I wanted it to have a Gothic touch – Agustín has been the link with everything else associated with science in the film. It was a very important collaboration, and I wanted this to be acknowledged in the film's credits.

MD: Antonio Banderas's performance offers a contrast both to his earlier roles in your films, and to the Latin heartthrob persona of much of his work in the US.

PA: I would agree – in many ways he's a different actor. He's not a different person, but in the 20 years since we last worked together, he's done things that have changed his technique. This might have been problematic had Antonio not been so generous and so attuned to what I wanted. He left me secure in the knowledge that I could suggest whatever was needed directorially and he would try it. It's been a bit of an apprenticeship for both of us to adapt to each other again, and specifically to what this film – and by extension this character – required.

MD: Stripped of the mannerisms that have defined much of his English-language work, there's a coldness to Banderas's portrayal of Ledgard that makes him very hard to read.

PA: I wanted to drain his face of expressivity and leave him totally aseptic and detached, a blank

THE FACE OF CHANGE

In 'The Skin I Live In', Antonio Banderas, left, is no longer the pretty boy he was in the early films he made with Almodóvar in the early 1980s



facade. This emptiness is in itself highly expressive for his character, because it signals a lack of feeling, and this is a trait that defines the psychopath. A psychopath is incapable of placing himself in anyone else's shoes. It's not that he enjoys inflicting pain on others, simply that he is unable to imagine that such pain can exist in another living being.

The reference point I gave him was [Jean-Pierre] Melville's *Le Cercle rouge* [1970]. It's a film that has nothing to do with *The Skin I Live In*, but is about a certain mode of acting that was what I was trying to achieve. I could have chosen any one of Melville's films, but I opted for *Le Cercle rouge* because it's a film about men. All the actors in the film – Alain Delon, [André] Bourvil, Gian Maria Volonté – have expressionless faces, and it's this impassive look that proves so communicative. Melville was a master of *noir*, able to milk silence to remarkable effect, and this is one of Delon's finest performances – he has the inscrutable look I wanted Antonio to have.

MD: Did you write the role of Ledgard specifically for Antonio Banderas?

PA: By chance, when I first read the novel I was on a trip to Hollywood, so I spoke to him about it. At first I thought it would be for him and Penélope [Cruz], but then as the script evolved there were times when I felt the character wasn't right for him, and increasingly I couldn't see Penélope taking on the role that became Elena Anaya's [Vera]. Once I was happy with the screenplay, however, I did think of Antonio, because he's an actor with great presence and I didn't want the character to be the typical baddie or a figure that you'd immediately judge as untrustworthy. I wanted him to look like a gentleman: suave and elegant on the outside. It's more interesting when you have that kind of demeanor.

We rehearsed for a long time – usually I rehearse for at least two months, with a pre-production period closer to five months. I wanted to be very secure before beginning to film. I also rehearsed for a considerable time with Elena Anaya and Jan Cornet, as their characters are also very complicated. I even rehearse while I'm filming. When we have the sets in place, I always rehearse in the mornings with the actors. Then the director of photography sets up the lighting and, once I know what I want the camera to do, I give final instructions to the actors and then we shoot.

I really felt I needed an extensive rehearsal period with these two actors, because they experience something that no one I know has gone through. So you have to give them a series of references that are not necessarily to do with real life, but about what you want them to do on screen. It's about drawing on their emotional memory bank. That's why I rehearse my films almost as if they were a piece of theatre.

MD: Banderas's withholding of emotions is beautifully contrasted with Roberto Alamo's raw physicality as Zeca.

PA: Yes, it was this animality that I wanted. As with Antonio's character in *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* – and despite the atrocities he's capable of committing – Zeca can sometimes be comical. Certainly the fact that he is literally presented as an animal – a tiger – gives it a comic dimension.

MD: Comic, but never ridiculous.

THE MAN WITH THE SCALPEL

Banderas's doctor in *'The Skin I Live In'* is only the latest in a long tradition of mad movie plastic surgeons. By **Kim Newman**

In 1924 Robert Wiene filmed Maurice Renard's novel *The Hands of Orlac*, casting Conrad Veidt as the concert pianist who's worried that the new hands grafted on to his stumps after a railway accident are those of a guillotined murderer – and that the alien fingers' impulse to strangle will override his wish to perform sonatas. When Karl Freund remade the film in Hollywood as *Mad Love* (1935), the emphasis changed, with the angst-ridden patient (Colin Clive) now upstaged by the flamboyant surgeon Dr Gogol (Peter Lorre) who performs the operation.

The progress of medical science has always inspired the gothic imagination. Renard's story has been remade several times, and inspired dozens of spin-offs about transplanted body parts which perhaps retain the souls of their original owners: the penis of *Percy* (1971), the body parts of *Body Parts* (1991), the heart of *Heart* (1997), the eyes of *The Eye* (2002). Dr Gogol, meanwhile, is in a line of descent that includes Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (another role for Colin Clive in James Whale's 1931 film) and H.G. Wells's Dr Moreau (most memorably incarnated on screen by Charles Laughton as a whip-wielding sadist in 1932's *Island of Lost Souls*).

The Hands of Orlac, and a whole genre of surgical horrors that followed, draws on such tabloid-friendly crazes as the procurement of anatomical specimens through body-snatching (Burke and Hare and their descendants recur in the cinema), the especially-hateful-to-British-sensibilities practice of vivisection of animals to advance the cause of knowledge (Moreau's cruel treatment of dumb beasts is his prime sin) and the turn-of-the-century quackery of rejuvenation through the implanting of monkey glands (as in the Sherlock Holmes story 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man', and a clutch of comic monkey-gland caper films in the teens).

In films, *Frankenstein* and Moreau are condemned for 'trespassing in God's domain' – which the staunchly atheist Shelley and Wells would have regarded as a gross misreading of their respective works – and their projects do ultimately seem to serve little purpose beyond illustrating human inadequacies. In the wake of World War One, however, attitudes even to mad science changed and the lab-coated lunatics of the 1930s at least pay lip service to helping humanity by reviving the dead (see *The Walking Dead*, 1936; *The Man They Could Not Hang*, 1939; *Man Made Monster*, 1941) or enabling crippled, mutilated or disfigured patients – scarcely in short supply during and



SURGICAL STRIKE

From the top: 'Face/Off'; Conrad Veidt with a murderer's hands in 'The Hands of Orlac'; Joan Crawford pre-surgery in 'A Woman's Face'

after the war – to 'live normal lives'. Somehow, this means that schemes intended to help cute little paraplegic girls walk again entail Boris Karloff dressing up as a gorilla to murder folk for their cerebrospinal fluid in *The Ape* (1940), which is actually one of the more grounded, reasonable mad-doctor quickies of its era. The tinkerer-with-flesh recently featured in *The Human Centipede* (2009), who sews three people together mouth-to-anus, would scarcely be out of place set beside the characters played by Karloff, Bela Lugosi, George Zucco, Lionel Atwill or John Carradine in the heyday of Hollywood horror.

Lugosi's Dr Vollin in *The Raven* (1935) is an even more demented genius than Lorre's Dr Gogol, but he is also one of several movie plastic surgeons (see also *Let 'Em Have It*, 1935; *Dark Passage*, 1947; *Jailbait*, 1954) who operate unethically to alter the recognisable faces of wanted criminals. "Maybe if a man is ugly, he does ugly things," muses Vollin's latest on-the-run customer (Boris Karloff), inspiring the doctor to deliberately disfigure the man (though he is still recognisably Karloff) so he can have a ruthless minion on hand. A modest reverse of this process is tried in Walter Hill's *Johnny Handsome* (1989), in which a freakish crook (Mickey Rourke) turns his life around when surgery performed in prison makes him look normal, where-

upon he sets out for revenge on those who have mistreated him. These days, however, cosmetic surgery has become such a mainstay of the Hollywood lifestyle that American films tend to touch on it only in throwaway jokes about hideous beautiful people (see *Just Go with It*, 2011), or to show the temptation a doctor who might be useful and poor in the sticks faces as a moneyed Beverly Hills facefixer (*Doc Hollywood*, 1991).

Even if George Cukor's *A Woman's Face* (1941) suggests that losing a facial scar can also enable a female crook (Joan Crawford) to escape evil influences, there's a queasy suggestion that the result is still some sort of monster. This notion is elaborated in many crossbreeds of horror and melodrama, including the films that most obviously shape Almodóvar's approach to the subject in *The Skin I Live In*. Terence Fisher's *Stolen Face* (1952), in which Paul Henreid reconfigures a Blitz-scarred petty crook as the image of the girl he can't get (Lizbeth Scott); Sidney Hayers's remarkably lurid *Circus of Horrors* (1960), with Anton Diffring reshaping scarred criminals as beautiful performers, before mutilating them all over again; and of course Georges Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* (1960), with Edith Scob in a distinctive white mask, endlessly recreated by her surgeon father.

Face swapping eventually reached the big-budget Hollywood mainstream with *Face/Off* (1997). But it was Jesús Franco's Franju rip-off *The Awful Dr Orloff* (1962) that brought the subject to Spain. Franco (who returned to the theme in 1987's *Faceless*) may be Spain's most *maudit* auteur, but Almodóvar – for all his arthouse cachet – is clearly conversant with his work: in *Matador* he even uses clips from Franco's 1981 film *Bloody Moon*.



PA: Never. Because he has enormous power, so it's neither a caricature nor grotesque.

MD: On this film you're also working once again with Marisa Paredes (Marilia). As with Carmen Maura in 'Volver' and Angela Molina in 'Broken Embraces', it's a memorable performance by an actress who's not afraid to show her age, and is now far removed from the seductive glamour she has brought to your past collaborations.

PA: I like to see how time passes. Life changes us all physically. With Marisa and Carmen I've been closer to that process, so it's more immediate for me. Marisa is still a very beautiful woman, but here I wanted something different to *All About My Mother* – a figure like 'Ma' Barker, one of those matriarchs who head crime families.

I wanted to draw on Marisa's tragic vein. Marilia is the character who is most conscious of the air of fatality that hangs over her family, and it's a fate that she battles with. She's a savage mother who has given birth to two mad and anomalous beings, and she acknowledges – in the Lorca-like monologue delivered to Vera – that she also carries the madness within her. Even watching her sons as children, playing at killing each other, she was aware that one day this would actually come to pass.

MD: Skin and its materiality is a recurring motif in the film: Marilia's lined face, Vera's luminous skin, the sweat on Ledgard's bronzed features, Zeca's birthmark, singer Concha Buika's tattoo, the grainy texture of skin captured in a newspaper photograph...

PA: Skin is the largest and most extensive organ that we have – it's what identifies us and separates us from others. It's the frontier between one individual and another.

MD: Another of the film's themes is culture as a way of nourishing the soul.

PA: Art allows Vera to survive – it gives her an instrument of hope. The fact that she copies the work of Louise Bourgeois from the only information she has at her disposal offers her a form of companionship. It's not about Elena's character being a great artist – she's not trying to be original; it's simply a balm that allows her to carry on.

MD: When Vera first appears in the film, she looks a little like one of Louise Bourgeois's spiders.

PA: Yes, there are so many elements that link the film to Louise Bourgeois's vast range of work. In her room Vera also copies a drawing on to the wall [Bourgeois's 1990 *Self Portrait*] where there's a circle, and within that circle there is a woman, and within that woman there is a man, and within that man there is a child. So all ages and genders merge as an expression of humanity. Then there are Bourgeois's stitched dolls that of course lead us to Vera's stitched body stocking. I asked Jean Paul Gaultier to provide a design where the stitches could be seen as if they were scars on a second skin.

MD: Vera also recreates images from Bourgeois's 'Femme Maison' series, which is tellingly about a woman imprisoned in a house. Bourgeois often works with prosthetic limbs:

THE ANIMAL WITHIN
The tiger-costumed Zeca (Roberto Alamo, left) with Marilia (Marisa Paredes, right)

'Skin is what identifies and separates us from others. It's the frontier between one individual and another'

mannequins, cyborgs and amputees are recurring motifs, as are medical instruments. These offer a link to the surgical profession and, by association, to Banderas's character.

PA: Yes. There's a work of hers with a cluster of pink dolls on a bed, *Seven in Bed*, which I first encountered at the Bourgeois retrospective at Tate Modern, and which has something of the emotive power I wanted to create in this film. Vera's ripping of her own clothes to create the work provides a remarkable emotional charge.

MD: But it's not just Bourgeois's work that's featured in the film. You also have Vera reading books by Cormac McCarthy and Alice Munro.

PA: There's a scene when Ledgard arrives home and he's been drinking, so he's more impulsive than usual, and Vera asks him, "Do you like what you see?" This is the beginning of the end, in that it's the first time that he begins to stagger and realise that the relationship he has with this woman is much stronger and more important than he thought. Vera's reading *An Angel at My Table* at this point – Janet Frame's autobiography, which is also about a survivor. I don't show the cover of the book, but it's useful for the actor to have this information to ground the character. *Runaway* is a collection of stories by Alice Munro, and there's a reason for featuring the book, but I can't divulge it now – you'll realise what it's about in the future.

MD: There are particular paintings in the film that you associate with Antonio Banderas's character.

PA: I use paintings to speak of the characters' states of mind, but they are also there to help me as a narrator to tell the story. Paintings are like music: both serve to cover the characters, like a costume. I explained what I wanted to Juan Gatti, my habitual graphic designer: the paintings at El Cigarral [should] show both female beauty and health – it's both a home and a clinic. So Titian's nudes [for instance] show a particular image of female beauty.

MD: Does the film's title also relate to how we assess a film by the skin – or genre – that it's cased in?

PA: As with so many of my features, *The Skin I Live In* moves across different genres. I don't really know how to classify it. My work as a director involves assembling a whole series of genres – from horror to sci-fi, melodrama to comedy. References to moments in other cinematic works –

so-and-so's costume, so-and-so's hair – are a mode of talking about the particulars of the film with my team, so that they know what I'm trying to achieve. But with *The Skin I Live In* it was hard to find what I wanted. I really invented the film on the go, accompanied on the journey by my director of photography, José Luis Alcaine, who gave the film the look I was searching for.

Twenty years ago I really liked post-1960s horror – the Hammer aesthetic, the Italian *giallo*, mainstream 1990s gore – but for this film I was far more influenced by pre-1960s black-and-white works like *The Invisible Man* [1933] and *The Day the Earth Stood Still* [1951], which aren't about delivering scary thrills. I thought a lot about George Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* [1959], which offers a very lyrical brand of horror. At one point I even considered making *The Skin I Live In* as silent cinema, in black and white, in the style of Fritz Lang or Murnau – although I pulled back as I didn't think it would be very commercial. I did, however, spend months thinking about it, and there's less dialogue in this film than is usual in my work.

MD: In many ways this is one of your most political films, in that it appears to warn of the unknown areas that science might lead us into. It touches on the ecological consequences of humanity's obsession with remodelling the world, while also homing in on society's obsession with the fabrication of cosmetic perfection and everlasting youth.

PA: The early drafts of the screenplay were more concerned with issues of plastic surgery. There was even a scene with Robert Ledgard giving a TV interview talking about creating the perfect face.

MD: One of my favourite moments in the film is the wedding scene when the action is suspended and Concha Buika sings the song 'Pelo amor de amar'. It reminded me of your use of Caetano Veloso's 'Cucurucucu Paloma' in 'Talk to Her'.

PA: In both cases it's about pausing the action to create a moment that bewitches the viewer. Here I needed this pause to take the narrative in another direction. Fortunately, I found this song – taken from a Brazilian film – which grabs the spectator. It is, I hope, a delicate moment of magic.

MD: Much of the film takes place in Toledo, which is also the city where Buñuel's 'Tristana' (1970) is set.

PA: I chose Toledo because of El Cigarral – Ledgard's home and private clinic. *Cigarrales* are palatial country houses that exist in Toledo, where there are a lot of cicadas – hence the name. El Cigarral is four kilometres from the city, but when we were preparing the opening sequence of the film, I remembered a lovely long shot of Toledo from *Tristana*, where Buñuel introduces the city. As I know many of the team who worked with him on the film, I asked where they placed the camera, and created the same shot. Film is a living thing for me and, as I'm realising my films, these references are always full of meaning for me.

MD: You've commented that a director is the nearest thing to playing God.

PA: It's a privilege to be able to work with a group of people to create a world that I have devised and fantasised about. This is the nearest thing to divinity I think there is.

■ *'The Skin I Live In'* is released on 26 August, and is reviewed on page 76



MARKS OF IDENTIFICATION

For all its novelty, Almodóvar's latest film also represents a defiant celebration of his past oeuvre, says **Paul Julian Smith**

There's little doubt that Pedro Almodóvar is now the most successful Spanish filmmaker of all time, whether that success is measured in terms of commercial or creative capital. With no fewer than 17 feature films released worldwide so far – none of which has failed to turn a profit – and countless honours (including the *Légion d'Honneur*, two Oscars and an honorary doctorate at Harvard), his career is unparalleled.

Yet strangely enough Almodóvar remains a prophet without honour in his home country. At a time when a newly impoverished Spain – shaken more than most by the financial crisis and wracked by popular protest – would seem to be in need of cultural heroes with international prestige, his reputation is under threat. Exhibit number one is his 18th – and latest – feature, *The Skin I Live In*. Well received at Cannes by the foreign press (including *Sight & Sound*), it was attacked by the main critic of the dominant daily *El País* as a “notable piece of nonsense” and “a tragedy with inadvertently comic results”.

While this particular critic has a long history of run-ins with the director (and Almodóvar has not minced his own words in his lengthy replies to such negative notices in the press), it remains the case that a filmmaker from a humble provincial background in La Mancha, who has shot all of his features on home turf and in his native language, has barely found acceptance within the mainstream of his own national cinema.

There is little mystery here. Most Spaniards believe that their essential genius (at least since Don Quixote, that other man of La Mancha) is for realism. Almodóvar's embrace of high-flown melodrama and super-stylised *mise en scène* could thus not be further from this austere tradition. While, typically, Spaniards lament that foreigners fail to appreciate their cinema (see the recent death of Luis García Berlanga, hailed at home as the greatest of directors, and little known abroad), in Almodóvar's case they complain, conversely but consistently, that a body of work lionised by outsiders must in fact be of little value to local cognoscenti.

Yet Spanish cinema needs its greatest star now more than ever. In a somewhat paradoxical development, the production of features in Spain (overwhelmingly state-subsidised) has greatly increased in the last few years, reaching an unprecedented 201 in 2010. Yet at the same time the domestic market share has tumbled, to a low of just 12 per cent in the same year. Once more there is little mystery here. While filmgoers in Spain, as elsewhere, tend to be teenagers, directors, mainly middle-aged men, turn their backs on the public to pitch quality projects (such as Civil War dramas) aimed at pleasing government-funding bodies



BLANK CANVAS

In *'The Skin I Live In'* Elena Anaya, above, plays Vera, a role Almodóvar originally considered for his past muse Penélope Cruz, before changing his mind

more than audiences. Enmeshed in a bitter debate about internet piracy (Spain suffers some of the highest rates of illegal downloading in the world), Spaniards should surely appreciate all the more the one director who has pleased cinephiles and populists alike through an unprecedented three decades. Although youth movies and coarse comedies are now the most popular Spanish movies domestically, Almodóvar's highly crafted and prize-winning films continue to make it into the national top ten of biggest grossers.

The Almodóvar brothers (Pedro and producer Agustín) cite piracy as the reason they didn't premiere *The Skin I Live In* theatrically in Spain before taking it to Cannes, as they have with earlier films. But if we turn to the feature itself, what's striking is the way in which the now mature director can be seen to be reflecting on his own history, as if implicitly defending himself from the detractors mentioned above. In fact at times it seems that it's not just the film's surgeon protago-

nist but the director himself who is playing Frankenstein, stitching together parts to create new life.

Almodóvar's time-travelling strategy is clear even in the opening sequence. *The Skin I Live In* begins with a modestly futuristic title: “Toledo 2012”. The words are placed over a picture-postcard view of the historic Spanish city, familiar to (and from) both El Greco and Buñuel. The film's main location is equally traditional: a luxurious country house with a distinctively local name, El Cigarral. Cutting quickly to an interior, accompanied by the urgent strings of Alberto Iglesias (the director's favoured composer since 1995's *The Flower of My Secret*), we find Almodóvar's new leading lady Elena Anaya as Vera, striking expert yoga positions while encased in a body stocking in that fashionable shade significantly known as ‘nude’. Steely housekeeper Marilia (Almodóvar veteran Marisa Paredes, almost unrecognisable here with her bottle-blond hair) sends Vera a cling-film-wrapped meal down from her kitchen, delivered by dumb waiter. It's the very image of the antiseptic isolation in which, we will learn, Vera is confined. ➡

The new film's kidnapping-captivity premise is clearly closest to 'Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!,' also with Banderas

◀ Next we cut to Antonio Banderas, as plastic surgeon Robert Ledgard, speaking in a lecture theatre on the topic of artificial skin. Shot from a high angle that reveals the semi-circular audience before him, the scene recalls the beginning of *Matador* (1986), where a then boyish Banderas played a troubled student listening to a lecture in an unlikely bullfighting academy. And when we visit Ledgard's ominous operating theatre at El Cigarral, with sliding glass doors encasing ancient brick vaults, it shows how modernity and tradition can coexist. Just as the film's complex plot shifts backwards and forwards in time, so Almodóvar goes in search of things past in order to rework classic themes with a new twist. To start with, the close-ups of medical paraphernalia here are reminiscent of *All About My Mother* (1999), while the fetishisation of medical masks, gloves and instruments that follows is creepily familiar from the films of what we now recognize as Almodóvar's 'late period'. Likewise the slow pan over a nude, sleeping Vera, closely observed by the surgeon on his widescreen TV, reminds us of the voyeurism of reality television that Almodóvar critiqued so presciently in *Kika* (1993).

Returning "home" to Almodóvar (as he put it in interview) 20 years after they made their last film together, *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!*, Banderas is curiously un compelling as the archetypal mad scientist. Prompted by his director (see the accompanying interview), he delivers an impassive performance, even as his character's turbulent backstory unfolds in flashback. Long ago Banderas specialised in obsessive lovers for Almodóvar – characters who combined erotic passion with murder (*Law of Desire*) or kidnapping (*Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!*). Their *idées fixes* were the flipside of the director's (and fans') equally devoted fixation on the actor's beauty. Banderas's looks, now sadly faded, serve here almost as a comment on that entropy of ageing that surgeons and cineastes alike seek in vain to vanquish.

As *The Skin I Live In* develops, such metaphors for cinema come thick and fast. Ledgard cultivates fragments of artificial skin in a petri dish, laboriously transferring them to his surgical creations. What better image of the filmmaker, splicing footage together to make a seamless but uncanny whole? Likewise Vera's body stocking, punctured by Jean Paul Gaultier with suture-like stitches, fits like a second skin. Can this troubling costume suggest that Almodóvar's cinema, newly revitalised by its references, is somehow now raised to the power of two?

The new film's kidnapping-captivity premise is clearly closest to *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!*, in which Banderas memorably bound Victoria Abril to a



HAUNTED BY THE PAST

'*The Skin I Live In*', above, contains references to Almodóvar's last film with Banderas, '*Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!*'; below right, as well as '*Kika*', below left

bed. But beyond this general resemblance, in one specific episode Marilia's crazy son Zeca breaks into the surgeon's house, ties his mother to a chair and noisily rapes Vera. It's a disturbing sequence copied almost shot by shot from *Kika*. Borrowed in similar fashion from *Tie Me Up!* is a plot strand in which it's not a girl but a boy (cute new 'chico Almodóvar' Jan Cornet) who is tethered in his underwear. World-weary Marilia warns her deluded employer that history repeats itself. But clearly it's advice that Almodóvar takes no more to heart than his compulsive protagonist.

In the formally complex context of the new film, Almodóvar appeals to some old collaborators, but in a new key once more. Alberto Iglesias's orchestral score, newly prominent, floods over the images. Antxón Gómez's art direction, as lush as ever (at one point red blood is spilt on a red bedspread), makes its presence felt in a bracingly austere setting. Meanwhile veteran José Luis

Alcaíne's cinematography is (perhaps deliberately) unobtrusive, except for some striking overhead shots and extreme close-ups, as when transgenic blood samples spread ominously across the screen.

The climactic theme of the vengeful transsexual, which surfaces late in *The Skin I Live In*, is perhaps Almodóvar's oldest and most persistent archetype, traceable back via *Law of Desire* and *Bad Education* (*La mala educación*, 2004) to an unpublished short story of the 1970s. This time, however, Almodóvar once more offers a novel spin on the sex-change theme that has been so central to his oeuvre. Meanwhile the film's main motif of artificial skin – so similar to celluloid – remains ambiguous to the end. Loyal as he is to 35mm, does Almodóvar still believe in the ontology of the photographic image – the ghostly trace of a body physically imprinted on film? Whatever the answer, Almodóvar – resisting, like film itself, the pathos of impermanence – has provided a lasting model of a cinema for troubled times: one that combines creative and commercial clout and – for all its stylisation and self-citation – doesn't fail to reach out and touch its faithful fans.



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COMPETITIONS

ANDRZEJ WAJDA: 'Ashes and Diamonds' on dual format to be won

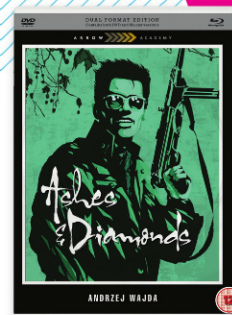
Ashes and Diamonds (1958) established Andrzej Wajda as a world-class talent in Polish cinema. Set at the very end of World War II, it interweaves in masterly fashion the fate of a nation with that of one man. When a resistance activist (Zbigniew Cybulski) is ordered to assassinate an incoming

commissar, he begins to question his motives, ending up with an existential crisis on what direction to take his life in. Mastered from a new 2k restoration, extras include an interview with Wajda and a comprehensive booklet. Courtesy of distributor Arrow Films, we have five copies to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

Q. Which one of these films was the first in Andrzej Wajda's trilogy on World War II and its legacy?

- a. Kanal
- b. A Generation
- c. Ashes and Diamonds



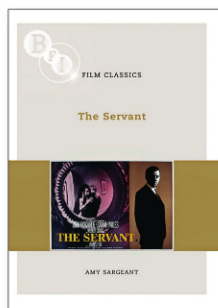
DIRK BOGARDE: BFI Classics to be won

Tying in with the Dirk Bogarde season at BFI Southbank (see our feature on page 40), BFI Palgrave Macmillan publishes two Film Classics on Dirk Bogarde films: *Victim* and *The Servant*. In the former, John Coldstream examines in detail the background to the production, and argues that the film's recognition as a classic is more than justified by the vital contribution it made to gay cultural history. In *The Servant*, Amy Sargeant discusses the film's history, also providing an analysis of its use of interior design to establish character and relationships. We have five pairs of the books to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

Q. What was Dirk Bogarde's SECOND film with director Joseph Losey?

- a. The Sleeping Tiger
- b. The Servant
- c. Accident



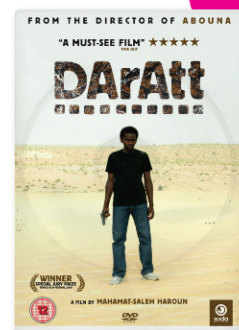
MAHAMET-SALEH HAROUN: 'A Screaming Man' and 'Daratt' to be won

Mahamet-Saleh Haroun's recent run of feature films tenderly place family relationships in the spotlight against the political landscape of civil war in Chad. His most recent, *A Screaming Man*, is released on DVD by Soda Pictures. It follows Adam, a pool attendant who takes great pride in his job. When the hotel he works for is taken over by new Chinese owners, who demote him and promote his son to his former role, Adam makes a decision that will change the course of both their lives forever. We have five copies to give away, along with Haroun's previous film *Daratt*.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

Q. Youssouf Djaoro (who plays Adam in 'A Screaming Man') stars in which other Mahamet-Saleh Haroun film?

- a. Abouna
- b. Daratt
- c. Bye Bye Africa



ANY GUN CAN PLAY: Guide to Euro-Westerns to be won

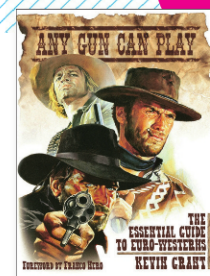
Cynical and stylish, bloody and baroque, Euro-westerns replaced straight-shooting sheriffs and courageous cowboys with amoral adventurers whose murderous methods would shock the heroes of Hollywood westerns. In *Any Gun Can Play* (published by FAB Press), film writer Kevin Grant puts the

phenomenon into perspective, exploring the films' wider reaches, their recurrent themes, characters, quirks and motifs. Illustrated with fantastic film stills and posters, and throwing the spotlight on unsung actors, directors and other artists, the book is a useful guide for both the connoisseur and the curious.

We have five copies to give away. To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

Q. Which actress was cast opposite Burt Reynolds in 'Navajo Joe'?

- a. Claudia Cardinale
- b. Rosalba Neri
- c. Nicoletta Machiavelli



HOW TO ENTER

Email your answer, name and address, putting either 'Ashes & Diamonds DVD', 'A Screaming Man and Daratt DVDs', 'Dirk Bogarde BFI Classics' or 'Any Gun Can Play book' in the subject heading, to: s&scompetition@bfi.org.uk.

Or send a postcard with your answer to either 'Ashes & Diamonds DVD competition', 'A Screaming Man and Daratt DVD competition', 'Dirk Bogarde BFI Classics competition' or 'Any Gun Can Play book competition', Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN

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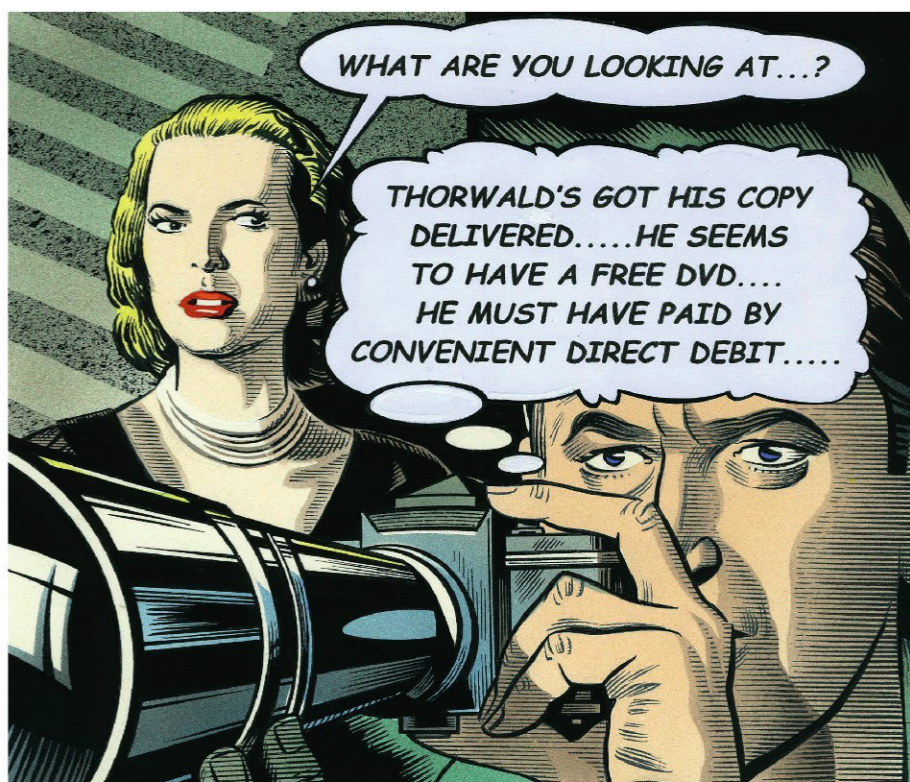
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*Charting two hitmen's journey into nightmare, 'Kill List' is an unsettling blend of visceral genre and everyday realism that more than confirms the promise displayed by writer-director Ben Wheatley in his 2009 debut 'Down Terrace'. He talks to **Nick Hasted***

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



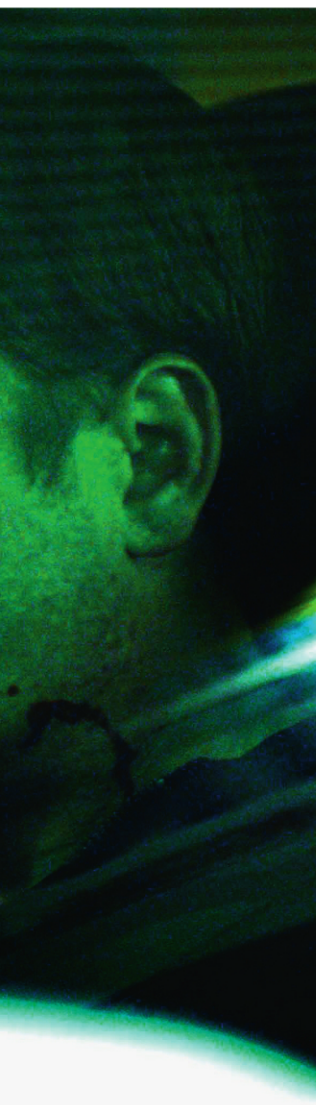
When the eight days shooting in his friend's dad's house were over, Ben Wheatley wasn't sure what he had done. The friend, Robin Hill, had co-written the script with him, and also starred as the son of Brighton drug dealer Bill (played by Hill's real dad Robert); Wheatley directed. Shot for only £6000, the resultant film *Down Terrace* seemed to eavesdrop on a bumbling working-class crime family as they explode with mutual frustration over dinner, or Bill breaks out his acoustic guitar or philosophises about the 60s. This gang of average idiots are very funny, not least the alleged mercenary who brings his toddler to a botched hit because he can't get a babysitter. That makes it hurt all the more when they start brutally murdering each other.

"We felt confused on the last day," Wheatley recalls when we meet in Brighton. "It felt like being in a performance-art installation more than normal filming. There was a rule that there'd be no stopping for the camera's sake, so you went from scene to scene, and the actors were always in character. That meant a very intense atmosphere, but we were all friends and there was no bad feeling, because we all knew that if it was rubbish, it didn't cost anything. We had no idea what it was like. It wasn't until we assembled it and watched it that we thought, 'It's a film. Oh, that's good.'"

Down Terrace was shot in May 2009, when Wheatley was 36. Briefly released in UK cinemas the following summer, it won Best British Feature at Raindance and Best Newcomer for Wheatley at the *Evening Standard* awards. Its reception at Austin, Texas's newly influential Fantastic Fest secured a US release. His follow-up *Kill List* is released in the UK this month, and his directorial voice is immediately recognisable as its two bantering working-class hitmen Jay and Gal (Neil Maskell and Michael Smiley) go about their business for the nameless upper-class Client, in between volatile, hilarious domestic scenes. But then two thirds of the way through, *Kill List* drops off a cliff face, into scenes of English rustic ritual and nightmarish, visceral horror.

Over the past few years, the UK has thrown up a few sporadically successful new genre directors: Neil Marshall with *The Descent* (2005), Paul Andrew Williams with *London to Brighton* (2006), James Watkins with *Eden Lake* (2008). Other dabblers have used crime or horror to more mutedly personal ends, such as Andrea Arnold with *Red Road* (2006). But Wheatley stands out from the crowd for being equally committed to both genre and realism. Steeped in cinema, he riddles his conversation with inspirations from Pontecorvo or John Carpenter, but rigorously avoids referencing them on screen. He is a pre-Tarantino director, uninterested in geeky irony or flash. He wants you to believe in his films, and hurt with his characters. ➡

MEN AT WORK
Gal (Michael Smiley, left) and Jay (Neil Maskell) are the hitmen in 'Kill List', the second feature from writer-director Ben Wheatley, right



Ben Wheatley Kill List

◀ The soon-to-be-notorious scene where *Kill List* turns and bites has that intent. Disturbed by discovered footage of screaming victims we never see, Jay takes a hammer to a bound man, beginning with his knees and beating him to a literal pulp. "It's a scene that shouldn't be with the rest of the film," Wheatley admits. "It's like it's happening in the middle of *Secrets & Lies*. You've jumped genres, like you've been watching trailers or sports on YouTube and then you see someone being executed. I was also thinking about *The Orphanage*, where someone's in a car accident and you see a bit, think, 'I didn't really want to see that,' then see a bit more – then see loads. After that you don't trust the filmmakers any more. Now they could go as far as this at any minute."

We've already seen a priest shot in the back of the head and, used to such screen carnage, felt nothing. Wheatley ambushes you in the later scene because the expected relief of the camera pulling away from the bone-shattering pain never comes. "That came from doing online viral, fake camcorder stuff early in my career," he explains. "Obviously you can't cut in that, or it looks fake. So I started building up this idea that cutting is fake, and editing is fake. Life is one continuous take – you only edit when you close your eyes or blink. And with effects things, the normal film grammar is a cutaway. You know in your heart they'll cut to a fake head or something, like *Hostel* or *Saw* – it's just a film. But as soon as you can't work out what the effect is – when you don't get that beat you're expecting – your brain says it's real. I feel bad putting it out there, because I believe in the collective consciousness, and those images are really horrible. I could," he says, not really joking, "have been making something nice."

Wheatley's films so far have been set in English edgelands, far from London. *Down Terrace* turns away from tourist Brighton to the rough Whitehawk estate, and the Sussex Downs and industrial estates its crime family uses like the desert burial ground in Scorsese's *Casino*. *Kill List* was shot around Sheffield. The motorway roundabout Jay peers at from his hotel window could be anywhere. "It's like John Boorman going to Los Angeles for *Point Blank*, and you'd never seen Los Angeles like that before," Wheatley says. "I felt that I hadn't seen that England really in films. It's lots of big roads and crap everywhere. You can travel up and down, and the country doesn't change."

There's a more sinister sense of place in his films too – of an old Britain familiar from *The Wicker Man* (which he rewatched before making *Kill List*) and still present near his Sussex home in the pagan bonfire rituals in Lewes every November 5, and in folk music's Copper Family, deep-rooted in Rottingdean, who soundtracked *Down Terrace*. "The idea in both films is a deeper English backstory that goes on in the land – the idea that this is a place where bad things have always happened," he says. "That's why I use all that folk music in *Down Terrace*. Jay in *Kill List* would have been happy at Agincourt, but now he's stuck in suburbia with the same basic make-up."

Wheatley lived in Billericay, Essex till he was eight, before moving to North London. That county left its mark on him too. "When I saw Baz Luhrmann's *Australia* I thought, 'It would be great



MULTITASKING

Michael Smiley also had a memorable bit part in Wheatley's first feature 'Down Terrace', as Pringle, the hitman with childcare issues

to do that about Basildon.' It's a dream project," he says, half-seriously. "My mum's got this brilliant story from when she was a little kid, and that'd be the beginning of it. *Kill List* is taken a lot from dreams I had in Essex, when we lived by the wood in Billericay. Being chased by cultists was a recurring nightmare, and being trapped in small spaces, and being chased by people who you didn't quite understand the purpose of, but you just knew they wanted to kill you."

These cultural roots combine with a political intent, most clearly in the aristocratic Client who hires Jay and Gal, played with near-silent dissoluteness by Struan Rodger. "They're like plumbers to him," Wheatley says. "I wanted to make something within genre, but it's also a drama about working people doing a job, who get fucked over by the people employing them."

Both films are also haunted by Iraq, where Jay and Gal were mercenaries. "Part of the idea of *Kill List* was that soldiers are used to being given very specific things to do, and when these things get messed up, it makes them ill," he explains. "There are specifically Blairy speeches in *Down Terrace* where, after loads of people have been killed, Bill says, 'We believed what we were doing was right.' That's no excuse when you've murdered people. There's a thing across our culture, isn't there, of World War II as the good war? And the sneaking suspicion that we might be the German populace now, and we're the ones not stopping it."

Giant home movies

Wheatley's TV break came in 2006, when he began directing live-action sections of the Channel 4 series *Modern Toss*; work on other series followed, including the Armando Iannucci-produced comedy *The Wrong Door* and BBC3's Johnny Vegas vehicle *Ideal*. Carelessly anti-social *Modern Toss* characters such as the Drive-by Abuser were an influence on Wheatley's voice, along with blackly comic, taboo-blind British comic-book writers such as Garth Ennis. "The production of *Modern Toss* was completely about sticking to their guns on everything and not wanting to please anyone,"

'I want it to feel as real as possible... I'm trying to take bits of genre and see how they work in my world'

Wheatley recalls. "Rob [Hill] and I became less fearful after working with them."

When Wheatley decided he had to make a feature film before he was 40, the affordable cinematic sheen of the just-available Red camera and a circle of willing creative friends made *Down Terrace* possible. (£110,000 in deferred fees has since been charged to its budget.) But films he'd made in that same house years before, and the people he'd come to know, had more influence on its disconcertingly realistic feel than the forebears referenced by critics – Mike Leigh, for instance. "The Leigh and Loach thing," he says, irritated. "I find it weird people saying 'kitchen sink' all the time about my work. I'm a big Alan Clarke fan. But my politics and my subject aren't anything to do with what they do. It's more from looking around me. My films are almost giant home movies, with the characters written as distorted versions of the actors, who I know, and are like family."

"We'd made a short film called *Rob Loves Kerry* [available on the *Down Terrace* DVD] ten years before," he continues. "And that was the start of it for me. With Amy Jump, who's my wife and co-wrote *Kill List*, we discovered this technique of cutting out exposition and just cutting from emotion to emotion – the ups and downs of a day, and how you negotiate with people that you love but hate at the same time, and how that's not schizophrenia, it's normal life. In the ten years it took to do *Down Terrace* I'd done lots of TV, which calmed me down a bit. But it's still got that spiky, New Wave kind of jump cutting. So does *Kill List*."

Wheatley has already dodged the fate of praised British debutants such as Jamie Thraves, who 11 years after making his first film *The Low Down* had to remortgage his house to get his third feature *Treacle Jr.* made. "The thing that was so liberating about *Down Terrace*," Wheatley says, "was that you knew that you could always just go and make another one that size. We don't need anybody's permission. The only thing that holds us back is writing the script. Me and Amy write all the time." He lists his upcoming slate: a Nick Frost comedy; *Sightseers*, "a *Honeymoon Killers*-style, handheld thing we haven't written"; *Freakshift*, "a more cartoony Verhoeven-type monster film with real emotional performances"; some "English Civil War stuff"; "an H.P. Lovecraft thing"; and "a psychedelic, symmetrical trip movie."

Kill List's comparatively leisurely three-week schedule ended with his four-man crew shooting in Yorkshire woods that genuinely freaked out the cast, not least his by then emotionally shattered lead Neil Maskell. Upcoming shifts in scale (one film is budgeted at £20 million) hopefully won't deflect Wheatley from his desire to make genre films that feel real, even as he's making them. "You get to know people, and then you're upset when bad things happen to them. That was the simple way I wanted to work," he says. "I want it to feel as real as possible. I'm not trying to expose genre – I'm trying to understand it, to take bits of it and then see how they work in my world. It's not a post-modern thing. It's not breaking genre to show its artifice. It's breaking it to drag it back into realism."

■ *'Kill List'* is released on 2 September, and is reviewed on page 67



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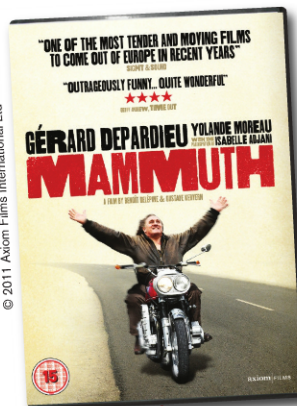


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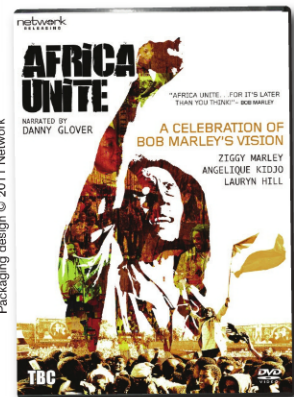
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After an unhappy interlude working in Hollywood, then in India and Italy, 1955's 'French Cancan' marked a triumphant return to home territory for the great French director Jean Renoir. **David Thompson** celebrates its rerelease in a magnificent new print

PARIS BY NIGHT



Le plus beau métier du monde is how Dangling, the impresario figure in Jean Renoir's *French Cancan* (1955), describes the world of showbiz and spectacle that is his first love – “the most wonderful profession in the world”. But if the character is clearly referring to the popular music hall of France's *belle époque* of the 1890s, Renoir himself also made plain that his film was a tribute to the whole spectrum of artistic creativity, including music, painting – and of course, cinema. “I believe in having your trade,” he said. “It seems to me that that's what we should base our lives on, and I think that *French Cancan* is above all else a homage to a trade.”

A fictionalised view of the creation of the Moulin Rouge and the revival of the spectacular dance routine of the title, *French Cancan* was a great comeback for its director. Renoir had not made a film in France since fleeing the Occupation in 1940 to take up residence in Los Angeles. Once there, the creator of the universally acclaimed *La Grande illusion* (1937) and the woefully misunderstood *La Règle du jeu* (1939) struggled to find his place in the Hollywood system. “Renoir has a lot of talent, but he isn't one of us,” was the verdict of Darryl F. Zanuck, his first studio boss. (The director's retort was that it had been “a pleasure working at 16th Century-Fox.”)

The exuberance, the experimentation, the acute feeling for natural locations and sympathy for all classes of humanity – so many elements that had been possible in the haphazard structures of the French film industry of the 1930s were drained from Renoir's American films. Occasionally there were

glimpses of the earlier glories – the close family in *The Southerner* (1945), the farcical intrigues of *The Diary of a Chambermaid* (1946) – but virtually all moral uncertainties were carefully excised by American puritanism. The Renoir who preferred to play scenes at length was ordered to supply wide, medium and close-up shots and avoid locations so that producers and their backers could control their product.

At a loss in this environment, Renoir seized upon the opportunity to go to India to make *The River* (1951), his first film in colour. His delicate adaptation of Rumer Godden's story of childhood in a colonial family was undoubtedly a personal project, in which flowing water – a potent image in earlier films such as *La Fille de l'eau* (1924),

Boudou Saved from Drowning (*Boudou sauvé des eaux*, 1932) and *Partie de campagne* (1936) –

reached fully symbolic proportions. Another production in

Technicolor followed,

The Golden Coach (*Le Carrosse d'or*, 1952),

filmed in three

language versions in

Rome's Cinecittà

studios, and star-

ring Anna

Magnani as the

principal performer

in a *commedia dell'arte*

troupe. The overt

artificiality of the

settings and the

heightened theatrical-

ity of the perfor-

mances puzzled

1950s audiences,

who still thought

of Renoir as the

master of realism. They had clearly forgotten that even a film as messily alive as *Boudou* was framed by a theatrical presentation – and that Renoir was always promiscuous with style.

Safe to return

If Renoir was delaying a return to France, one reason was the simple fear that since he had married his former assistant Dido Freire in Hollywood, and his divorce from his first wife Catherine Hessling was not legally binding in his homeland, he would be arrested there for bigamy. Only when Hessling's claims on him were thrown out by a court in 1949 was he advised that it was safe for him to walk again on French soil.

In the early 1950s, Renoir nurtured a film project on Van Gogh, to star Van Heflin. But the announcement of Vincente Minnelli's forthcoming biopic of the painter, *Lust for Life*, put a stop to that. At the same time, Renoir received an invitation from the producer Henri Deutschmeister to return to France to make a film with the title *French Cancan*. There was a vague story, and at one stage another director (Yves Allégret) had been attached. But now Renoir was given carte blanche to write his own script from the idea of an impresario (based on the real founder of the Moulin Rouge, Charles Zidler) and his discovery of a young dancer. For Renoir, this was the chance to reach a large audience in France once again, working with people he knew, who shared his language. It was also an opportunity to recreate the proletarian, almost rural Montmartre he had known around the turn of the century, growing up as the son of the great Impressionist painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir.

Renoir's newly shaped narrative follows what became a favourite template: a woman pursued by three suitors. Laundry girl Nini is discovered dancing in a café by Dangling, wooed by a wealthy prince of Balkan origins, and followed everywhere





OBJECT OF DESIRE

Jean Renoir, bottom left, chose Françoise Arnoul, above centre and all pics, to play Nini, the dancer wooed by Jean Gabin's impresario Danglard, left

by her first love, a fiercely jealous young baker. Renoir was at first determined to have Nini played by Leslie Caron, who two years earlier had triumphed in *An American in Paris*. When that proved impossible, he agreed to Françoise Arnoul, then popular in France as a pre-Bardot 'sex kitten'.

The producers wanted Charles Boyer for Danglard, but when he dropped out, the name Jean Gabin came up. Gabin had starred in three Renoir films in the 1930s but, having largely disappeared into service during the war, had only just reasserted himself on the French screen in Jacques Becker's *Touchez pas au grisbi* (1954). At first the actor was wary of Renoir, finding it unacceptable that the son of the great French painter should have taken US citizenship. But the two were successfully united from day one of filming, which took place at the Francoeur Studios between October and December of 1954. In spite of the cold (in photos from the set, Renoir is often wearing an overcoat), a warm rapport was quickly established between Renoir, his crew and his actors.

Shot entirely on studio sets, *French Cancan*'s production design (by the veteran Max Douy) is remarkably realistic and evocative. The images undoubtedly owe their foundation to the impressionistic vistas of Renoir's father, with Utrillo, Degas and Lautrec also clearly there as references (though without any explicit homage). Renoir made a point of sampling Paris's modern café-concert scene to find performers suited to play their 1890s counterparts, and the singers Edith Piaf and Patachou turn up in brief cameos playing period artistes. He also gave small parts to old favourites, including Gaston Modot (from *La Règle du jeu*) and Max Dalban (from *Boudu* and 1935's

Tonin), and cast his *Madame Bovary*, Valentine Tessier, as Nini's mother.

For the 1994 centenary of Renoir's birth, I made a BBC *Omnibus* film on the director, and interviewed two of the actors from *French Cancan*: Arnoul and Pierre Olaf, who played the whistling Pierrot (in a costume similar to that worn by the young Jean in a famous painting of his father's). Both welled up with tears at the memory of the director, his way of effusively praising everyone before making any critical comments, and his constant determination to make them feel secure in their performances.

Renoir himself once commented that the subject of *French Cancan* was "as thoroughly child-like and as obvious as that of a western". For him, it was all about the expressivity that the subject afforded – the pleasure he could take in recording movements and gestures. In this he felt a deep connection with his father, who rigorously rejected any intellectual interpretation of his paintings. Renoir had featured a cancan sequence in his silent 1926 version of Zola's *Nana*. But, frustrated by the lack of sound at the start of his career, he had always dreamed of making a thoroughly musical film. In *French Cancan* there are nods to this ambition, with popular artiste Philippe Clay suddenly bursting into song, to the accompaniment of an unseen orchestra.

It's an aspect of Renoir's mastery that such moments blend perfectly with dialogue and action

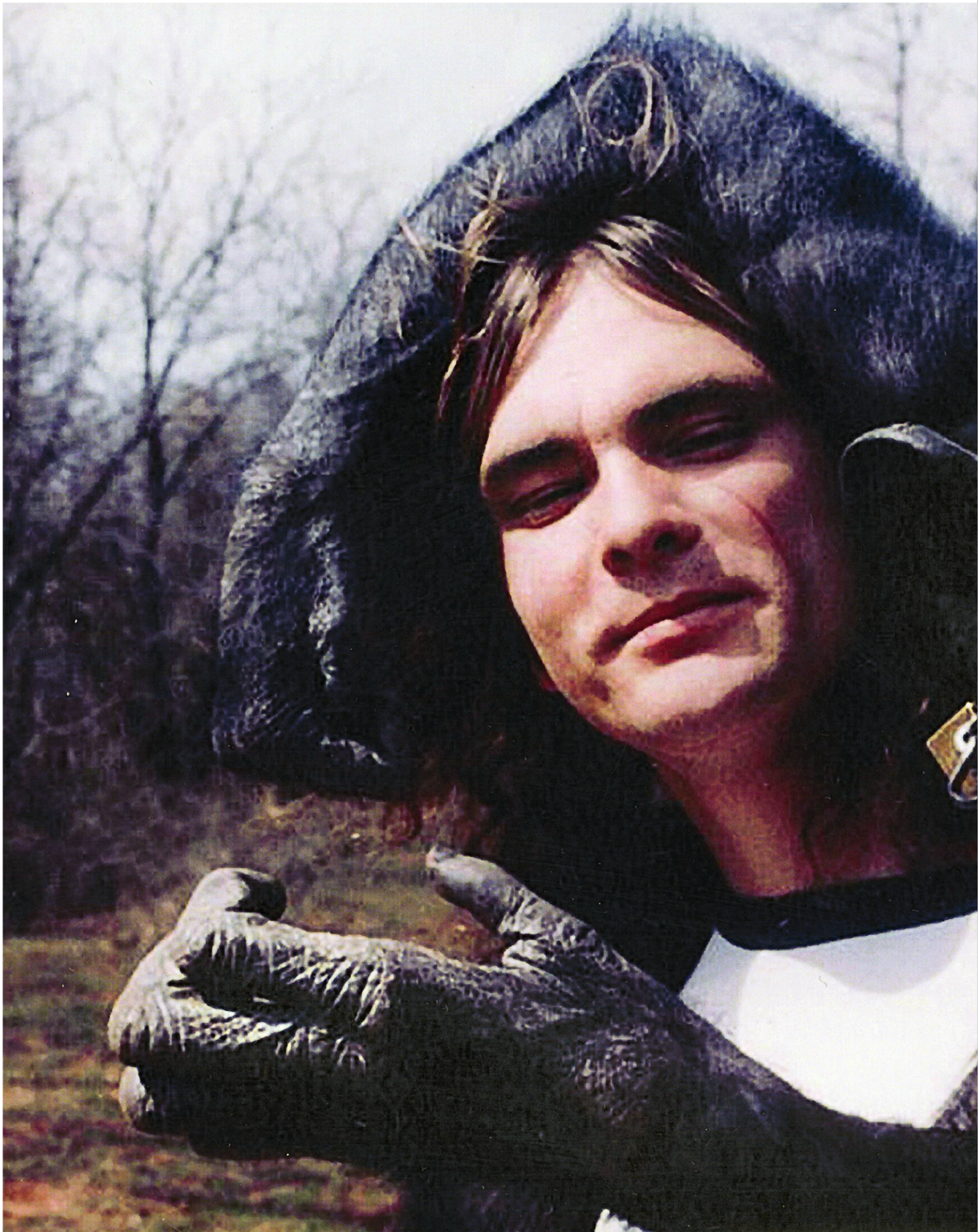
The final cancan sequence, 20 minutes of explosive joy, is a total vindication of the directness of his art

that's spontaneously flamboyant and alive. The final cancan sequence, 20 minutes of explosive joy, is a total vindication of the directness of Renoir's art. The sheer ebullience of the performers and a classic editing style prove vastly more effective than Baz Luhrmann's machine-gun cutting in *Moulin Rouge!* (2001), or indeed the studied framing of John Huston's 1952 film of the same title, which does try a little too hard to emulate Lautrec.

What might appear brazen in *French Cancan* today is its refusal to judge the characters – especially the exploitative Danglard, who changes lovers at whim, wedded only to his art. His declaration of independence to Nini – who almost jeopardises the whole show because of her jealousy – is based on the idea that all that counts is serving the audience (and anyway, he'd make a lousy husband). Gabin was an imposing 50 when the film was made, so his character's advances to the 23-year-old Françoise Arnoul perhaps have a different resonance today. (As I write this, the Dominic Strauss-Kahn controversy is bubbling away, polarising opinion everywhere.) After all, Nini gives up her virginity to her young lover in the knowledge that subsequently she will have to sacrifice herself to Danglard. Renoir was unrepentant about such matters, exposed as he had been by his father to a casual, hedonistic view of the opposite sex. The spectator either accepts this as a generosity of spirit, or will be sorely tried by such pervasively Gallic attitudes.

Either way, *French Cancan* is full of irresistible force and vigour, and in its day it wowed cinema-goers in Europe. Ever more resplendent in its colours and energy after a digital makeover, it should continue to give the same extraordinary pleasure today.

■ 'French Cancan' is rereleased on 5 August at BFI Southbank, London, and selected cinemas nationwide





PLAYMATES AND PRIMATES

*Charting an experiment in which a chimp was raised by humans, 'Project Nim' tells us less about science than about the ethos of the 1970s, says **Nick Roddick***

Here's the story: a chimpanzee raised as a human adapts surprisingly well to human society, picking up enough sign language to get what he wants. Human society, however, has more difficulty with the chimp's natural sense of hierarchies, and eventually sends him back to his cage.

Here's the story the other way round: a human baby raised by apes is 'rescued', taught human language and reintroduced to Edwardian England at its most lavish. Despite manifold temptations, the man-child forsakes his heritage and returns to the wild.

The first, a true story based on interviews and archive footage, is told in James Marsh's intriguing and affecting new film *Project Nim*. The second, a scarcely credible tale based largely on a misreading of audience tolerance, is *Greystoke*, the supposedly 'serious' version of the Tarzan story made in 1983, just after Project Nim proper was shut down. ➔

ALL CREATURES
'Project Nim' takes its name from the chimp at the centre of the experiment, but it's even more revealing about the people involved, including Bob Ingersoll, left



Project Nim

BRINGING UP BABY
Initially raised in the family of Stephanie LaFarge, far right with Herb Terrace, Nim became too boisterous for Manhattan, and was moved to a country estate, where he continued to communicate with researchers via sign language



◀ There may seem to be few similarities between the two stories (beyond the fact that one is the mirror image of the other), but there is one key factor that links them: both draw on our tendency to romanticise animals as being more ‘natural’ than we are – and our subsequent unwillingness to live with the consequences.

Greystoke does this sentimentally (Christopher Lambert returns to the lush green jungle with an apeline wave of his arm). *Project Nim*'s conclusion is more realistic and, as a result, more disturbing. Nim is abandoned by the humans he thought were his friends and family – in short, the people who had constituted his entire world from when he was a few days old (he was six before he saw another chimp) – like a discarded toy or a puppy after Christmas.

Nim's story is a mixture of 18th-century *Bildungsroman* and 19th-century melodrama. He was taken from his mother at the Institute for Primate Studies in Oklahoma when he was a few days old and, as part of a scientific experiment to see whether a chimp could be taught human language, was initially raised by a wealthy family in Manhattan. When he became too exuberant for city life, the project was moved to the Delafield estate in Riverdale, just outside the city. There, Nim lived a bucolic life with a series of research assistants, making occasional trips on to campus for more controlled teaching. Along the way, he picked up a fair but not astonishing amount of sign language (the kind used by the deaf), most of it motivated by the desire to get what he wanted rather than to communicate for its own sake. ‘Play’ was his best sign, along with ‘banana’ and – when he was bored with the research lab – ‘potty’, since it meant he had to be taken out of the room.

As he grew stronger and his natural desire to dominate began to emerge, however, Nim proved too much for the researchers. There were some nasty bite injuries and the project was abruptly shut down. Nim was sent back to Oklahoma, where life was good for a while; then the institute's money ran out and, in a plot development you

Trying to understand the links between man and his nearest relative is a centuries-old obsession

could hardly get away with in a melodrama, he was shipped to an animal-testing centre with the improbable name of LEMSIP (the Laboratory for Experimental Medicine and Surgery in Primates). He was eventually rescued by a horse refuge in Texas, but he was the only chimp there, and went into a deep depression. Some years later Bob Ingersoll, who had looked after him in Oklahoma, managed to regain access and make Nim's final years more comfortable.

Nim died of a heart attack in March 2000. He and Ingersoll still share a Facebook page.

Signs of the 70s

What gives *Project Nim* a fascination – beyond the (seemingly unresolved) question of whether a chimp can learn language – is that most of it takes place in the 1970s. And it is with this aspect of the film – rather than with the merits of Marsh's approach, the correctness or otherwise of the original project, or the film's potential impact on the use of primates for medical research – that I am mostly concerned here.

Trying to understand the links between man and his nearest relative is a centuries-old obsession. It has spilled over into the cinema in ways that are banal (the Tarzan movies, *Greystoke* included), vaguely philosophical (*Planet of the Apes*) and downright weird (Oshima Nagisa's *Max, mon amour*, in which Charlotte Rampling takes an ape called Peter as her lover). *Project Nim*, however, is very much a product of the 1970s. Even the chimp's full ‘name’ – Nim Chimpsky, a pun on the semi-eponymous philosopher of language and inventor of generative grammar – seems to belong

to that decade, in which sounding amusingly hip was always going to score over being sincere.

Certainly, the chimp's dignity was never an issue, either in the way he was named or in the project that was named after him. This, of course, is not to say that Nim would have fared any better if his project had happened in, say, the 1980s: indeed, he'd probably have been even worse off (and had less fun to start with). But it would certainly have been a different project – and a different film. Above all, there would have been less smug, buck-passing hypocrisy about the whole affair.

Decades are funny things. As Andy Beckett points out in his exhaustive study of Britain's experience of the period in question, *When the Lights Went Out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies*, you can't straitjacket an entire decade into a series of generalisations. Beckett aims “to restore some of the vivid complexity of the decade as it was actually experienced”.

But in the selective archive footage shown in Marsh's film, Nim's world looks both distant and far from complex: the helmet-like coiffures, bell-bottom trousers and proudly synthetic leisurewear of the human beings seem as quaint as Edwardian collars and lacquered hair. Equally bizarre – bordering on the disturbing – are the sexual attitudes of the humans, which reek of the 1970s. Everyone seems to have been bonking one another on a regular basis (Nim himself was excluded, but Stephanie LaFarge, his first carer, was very interested in his masturbation). And the scientist in charge of the project, Herb Terrace, seems to have been particularly adept at getting his end away.

One of the unknowns in Marsh's method – as with any documentarian – is what questions were put and what answers left out. As a result, it's hard to tell whether Terrace, the Columbia University behavioural psychologist who ran *Project Nim*, is simply stating a fact or defending himself against an accusation when he says: “I don't think my feelings about [research assistant] Laura [Petitto] got in the way of the science.” On the other hand, it seems



pretty clear that “feelings” is a euphemism.

Crucial to political, personal and cultural life in the 1960s was the notion of praxis, which can be broadly summed up as a belief in the dialectical relationship between theory and action: your theoretical beliefs in the need to transform the world (a *sine qua non* of 1960s thought) determines what you do, which in turn enriches the original theory. Or, as Tony Wilson of Factory Records put it (speaking, of course, of the 1970s) it meant “doing something, and then only afterwards finding out why you did it”. Less cynically, the point was that direct action was not to be undertaken for its own sake – and that free love was more than just self-indulgence. The transition from the 1960s to the 1970s saw the theoretical side of things being allowed to lapse, leaving just the action. Protest marches gave way to street fighting, free love to regular sex. Even the music lost its history: the blues-based riffs of Led Zeppelin slowly gave way to the power chords of heavy metal.

It's hard to watch Marsh's film without hearing the ghostly voice of Michael Redgrave from the start of *The Go-Between* (released, incidentally, in 1970). “The past is a foreign country,” he intones, looking back on that charmed final summer of Edwardian indolence and cricket matches. “They do things differently there.” The world we see in *Project Nim* now seems a very foreign country indeed. Made up of archive footage, talking heads

(mainly the people involved, but in some cases actors speaking their words) and those elegant semi-dramatised links that are Marsh's trademark, the film needs not so much subtitles as a full crash-course in cultural history if we are to understand the nuances of what the various scientists, carers and first-hand witnesses keep telling us.

Those who were present as children while it was all going on – LaFarge's daughter Jenny, for example – can dismiss their parents' behaviour with a knowing shrug. “It was the 1970s,” she says, as though that explains everything. And, in a way, it does. But what are we to make of her mother's matter-of-fact remark slightly earlier in the film that “the people I'm the closest to are the people I've had some period of sexual contact with”?

The assumptions underlying that sentence in general – and in particular the dreadful phrase “sexual contact”, situated as it is somewhere between the venereal clinic and the bedroom – are among the things that make the film so fascinating. They may tell us nothing about Nim, but they do tell us a lot about the 1970s. The notion of emotional responsibility – to partners, children and, indeed, other human beings – is absent, as is any idea of treating Nim himself as a sentient being with his own agenda, rather than the subject of an experiment. As a result, Nim learns more about the people than most of the people learn about Nim. And, for an outside observer – a viewer of the film, in other words –

it's not him but the people who are its subject.

One specific point anchors *Project Nim* firmly in the early 1970s: the use of sign language as a way of helping those with normal hearing and speech but difficulties in communicating was very much in fashion. So too (a legacy of behaviour-modification techniques) were strictly controlled environments, meticulous logging of daily sessions and discussion of the subject's development. But despite Marsh's reference in the Director's Statement to the “sterile manner” in which the experiment was conducted, all of the above seem to have been entirely lacking from the original project (a point made by one astonished research assistant).

Indeed, the loopy, laissez-faire approach to the whole business, especially in the early period with LaFarge, is what makes the film so disturbing. Sterility had nothing to do with it; untheorised bonding was all. It's as if theory began and ended with the decision to plonk a baby chimp in a human family home; the rest was action, mainly on Nim's part (he quickly grasped that LaFarge's husband was obsessive about how his books were shelved, and took special delight in pulling them off). Maybe there were bits of the project we don't see where Nim's actions were carefully analysed and the experiment modified as a result. Maybe praxis was practised. But it doesn't look like it. The insights that we do get are resolutely untheorised, such as the observation that Nim “knew every dynamic that was in the room instantly” – true, but a remark based on empathy, not analysis.

In the end, it seems strangely significant that Nim's eventual saviour Bob Ingersoll, the pony-tailed Deadhead who first met him when he was returned to Oklahoma, is someone who never left the 1960s. (At one stage he measures his friendship with Nim by saying that, if he had to choose between hanging with Nim or hanging with Jerry Garcia, it'd be a difficult call to make.) Poor Nim: born too late.

**LOOK BACK
IN WONDER**
With 'Project Nim'
James Marsh, right,
returns to the 1970s
America he explored in
his Oscar-winning 2008
documentary 'Man on
Wire', far right



■ 'Project Nim' is released on 12 August, and is reviewed on page 73



THE LAST OF ENGLAND

David Gladwell worked as Lindsay Anderson's editor on 'If...' before directing 'Requiem for a Village', a haunting and poetic 1975 evocation of English country life under threat from the destructive forces of modernity. **Michael Bracewell** welcomes its reissue

Above the fields, the haze appears tremulous and golden – the half-slumber of an English summer afternoon, drifting between dreams and waking. Field flowers shiver in a mist of feathery seeds; and then the relentless yellow bulk of a bulldozer, instantaneously levelling the land to a flattened causeway of stones and mud, churns the grass and flowers and weeds to nothingness. The meeting point between ancient countryside and land clearance becomes a supernatural border in which time itself seems plate-tectonic, the advancing edges of the present and the future scraping up ghosts as they make contact with the denser mass of the past. Resurrection in a country churchyard becomes almost secular in its apparent place in a natural order; the dead are kindly and quotidian, vulgar and brutal – a former community waking and rising together to celebrate a country wedding, harvest the crops, satisfy their lusts.

David Gladwell's haunting and portentous 1975 film *Requiem for a Village* might be likened to an impressionistic prose poem on the themes of time, nature and mortality, symbolised through the pending demolition of an English village and its surrounding countryside. Viewed 36 years after its completion, the film retains its ability to bewitch and disturb in equal measure. There is a tautness and tension to both its editorial temper and, more specifically, the concision and intensity of its central imagery, entwined narratives and interweaving timescales. This is a film in which economy and restraint, in terms of craft, become the agents of a near-hallucinogenic exploration of landscape and history.

What you get are two concurrently paced but equally fragmented storylines, one of which is set in the present of the mid-1970s and documents (in a quasi-documentary style) the imminent extinction of a Suffolk village to make way for a new residential development. The aggressive forces of modernity are represented by excavating machinery (diggers and bulldozers) and – as at the close of Fellini's film love letter to Rome, *Roma* (1972) – by a youthful gang of speeding bikers. The triumph – and habitat – of this modernity is a somnambulant and featureless estate of new houses, over which the summer birdsong is drowned by the inanities of a disc jockey's patter.

Proceeding from the English pastoral of its flute-led introductory music, and the Watts-style art nouveau flourishes beneath its opening credits, *Requiem for a Village* immediately apprehends the viewer by beginning with a succession of still, sunlit shots of the undulating rooftops and residential roads of this new estate. And it is from one of these modern houses that the principal figure of the film emerges: an elderly sexton, wheeling his bicycle as he sets off to the churchyard of the old village beyond the new dual carriageway. This character, brilliantly played by Vic Smith, will be the psychic conduit through which past and present connect – and, ultimately, the tragic ceremonial victim of their collision.

Running parallel to this narrative, but joined to it by way of a remarkable scene of churchyard resurrection (based on Stanley Spencer's fantastical paintings of the same subject from the 1920s), are loosely connected scenes of life in the village as it was led a hundred years earlier; the occupants of



THE PAST IS WITH US

The resurrection scene links the film's sequences of bygone country life with a semi-documentary portrait of the modern village under threat

the sexton's graves are the participants in these daily dramas. Played by local villagers, these 19th-century farm workers also appear in *doppelgänger* form as their 20th-century descendants.

That Gladwell worked earlier in his career as editor on Lindsay Anderson's surrealistic satires of Englishness *If....* (1968) and *O, Lucky Man!* (1973) relates the darkling mood of *Requiem for a Village* to the ambivalent yet highly charged romanticism of Anderson's vision of archetypal English institutions. But where Anderson's political allegories, retrospectively, can appear as adolescent and petulant as his characters are timelessly cool, Gladwell's view of the countryside *in extremis* seems far more balanced and accepting – closer to the melancholy of W.H. Auden's poem 'Get there if you can and see the land you once were proud to own' than the anger of George Orwell's *Coming up for Air*. Neither past nor present is idealised or forgiven in Gladwell's version; rather, both reveal their brutality and fallen morals in the shocking scene of a rape (a metaphor, perhaps, for the assault on the countryside by progress) that updates from the older timescale to the younger.

Literary precedents for *Requiem for a Village* appear to be 18th-century as much as bleakly modernist; while Gladwell never idealises the rustic past, his film reclaims the mood of Oliver Goldsmith's 1770 poem 'The Deserted Village': "Ev'n now the devastation is begun,/And half the business of destruction done;/Ev'n now, methinks, as pond'ring here I stand,/I see the rural virtues leave the land." Similarly, Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' (1751) comes irresistibly to mind, as its meditation on mortality holds firm to the value and poignancy of the unknown and unknowable lives of long-dead strangers – a sentiment later condensed by Morrissey in his song 'Cemetery Gates': "All those people, all those lives, where are they now?"

Like E.M. Forster (a writer who embraced the English literature of the 18th century, in terms of both its wit and its melancholy), Gladwell sees the

corrosion of the countryside by suburbia and the motorcar. In terms of British film, his sensibility thus seems miles distant from the vision of Powell and Pressburger (notably in their quasi-propaganda film *A Canterbury Tale*), in whose eyes English country heritage was both mystical and morally restorative.

That Gladwell studied first as a painter, at Gloucester Art College, becomes apparent in his astute yet deeply poetic sense of composition, form, colour and atmosphere. His hypnotic evocation of time and place often appears reminiscent of the elegiac eeriness of the Neo-Romantic sensibility in British art that flourished between the late 1930s and the middle years of the 1950s, exemplified by the work of artists such as Graham Sutherland, Paul Nash and John Piper.

Unsurprisingly, Neo-Romanticism looked to the visionary sensibilities of William Blake and Samuel Palmer, while refracting the concerns of both Surrealism and Post-Impressionism through a prism of deeply felt Englishness. For the Neo-Romantics, art combined the roles of elegy and premonition, reactive to the conversion of nature into the supernatural, and of history into myth. Magic, likewise, was seldom distant – an affiliation shared in Gladwell's film by the arcane lore of the village farrier (in this case the use of frog bones to charm horses) being passed on as secret knowledge from master to apprentice.

As a study of 'Englishness', therefore, *Requiem for a Village* appears to update and readdress, at an almost subsonic level, the poetics and temporal concerns of Neo-Romanticism to the New Build mentality that was prevalent in Britain during the 1970s. (This was also the period during which luminaries such as Sir John Betjeman were campaigning to protect important Victorian and

Neither past nor present is idealised or forgiven in Gladwell's version; rather, both reveal their brutality

Georgian buildings from precisely the kinds of encroaching development depicted in Gladwell's film.) But within its relation to the past and to the history of England's view of progress, there is a rigorous modernity to *Requiem for a Village* that frees it from both nostalgia and cynicism.

Gladwell's exploration of filmmaking seems painterly, and derived as much from ideas within fine art as from the "dreamlike quality of many of the European films" that he writes about admiring (in the booklet accompanying the new DVD release). His earlier short films *A Summer Discord* (1955), *Miss Thompson Goes Shopping* (1958) and *An Untitled Film* (1964) all rehearse his particular interest in the use of slow motion, editing and sound montage to create an intense or even dreamlike sense of place and incident.

A kind of Englishness

Where might *Requiem for a Village* take its place within contemporary culture's vexed discourse on Englishness? Fittingly enough for a filmmaker who studied at art school (and has subsequently returned to painting), the subject, mood and ambiguity of *Requiem for a Village* chime directly with the work of several British artists on the current scene. George Shaw's large-scale charcoal drawings of semi-derelict woodland around suburban Coventry come to mind, as do Clare Woods's eerie, high-gloss oil paintings of fallen trees and undergrowth. At the same time, Jeremy Deller's exploration of English folk anthropology and subculture could be seen as a direct descendant of Gladwell's project, while Gareth Jones's investigations into the creation and founding vision of Milton Keynes – as a fusion of modernist town planning and late hippie ideals – present a new chapter in the cultural and artistic discussion around landscape and regeneration.

As a film made in 1975, Gladwell's *Requiem for a Village* also finds its place within a broader development – between the late 1960s and late 1980s – of photographic documentation and analysis of changes in British folk culture and society. (For a bravura survey and analysis of this period, see David Alan Mellor's *No Such Thing as Society: Photography in Britain 1967-1987*.) During those years, a new generation of photographers and artists – including Tony Ray-Jones, Daniel Meadows, Keith Arnatt, Homer Sykes and Martin Parr – were recording the complex processes and often startlingly surreal manner in which the 'Englishness' of remembered idyll, tradition and pageantry was suddenly coming up against a brute force of modernity. The resultant and inevitable conflict, acted out in *Requiem for a Village* in something approaching the masque form of dramatic allegory, would see the increasing isolation of old ideals, and the preparations – beginning with the land itself – for the mono-environment of consumerism and consumer lifestyle that would spread across the UK from the late 1980s onwards.

This brute economic cynicism, one feels, was the ultimately political triumph that Lindsay Anderson both despised and feared, and which his films described with such horrific premonition. *Requiem for a Village* is both gentler and warmer, more poetry than prose, but no less despairing in its conclusion.

■ *'Requiem for a Village' is out now on BFI DVD and Blu-ray*

DIRK BOGARDE

A CLASS ACT

*A bland British comedy star in the 1950s, Dirk Bogarde reinvented himself as an icon of European arthouse. But on screen, as in his memoirs, he remains a difficult actor to pin down, says **Nick James**, in the latest of our occasional series 'The Actors'*



THE REINVENTOR
The Rank matinee idol of 'Doctor in the House', left, and 'The Spanish Gardener', right, transformed himself into the star of European art movies like 'Providence', below



As a species, the movie star is reckoned – in these post-reality-television, everyone's-a-star days – to be under threat. There may be no better time, then, to look back at the career of Dirk Bogarde (1921–99), a natural screen actor who, over 60-odd films, managed a rare transformation that some of today's faltering marquee attractions might look upon with envy. From being an adored matinee idol (and, for publicity purposes, English 'lord of the manor') for the Rank Organisation in the 1950s, peaking in popularity as the dashing young medic Simon Sparrow in the comedies *Doctor in the House* (1954), *Doctor at Sea* (1955) and *Doctor at Large* (1957), he went on to become a highly regarded master performer in such European arthouse films as *The Damned* (1969), *Death in Venice* (1971) and *The Night Porter* (1974).

That's the official story, self-created in the actor's own writings. But here I want to give a personal view. Two simultaneous and contrapuntal responses to Dirk Bogarde are traced below: a critic's growing respect and sympathy, coupled with a devotee's mature disenchantment. And the obvious lesson to be drawn is that, if you want to keep the faith with a celebrity, you should try not to learn too much about them.

My own admiration of Bogarde stems from the late 1970s and early 1980s, when he was one of my icons of masculine 'style'. This was a moment in popular culture when such things seemed crucial. Robert Mitchum (about whom I've written before, see 'The Actors', *S&S*, August 2005) was perhaps more important to me – and it's pretty obvious which end of the masculinity spectrum Mitchum represents, despite his voluptuous looks when young. In comparison, a slipperiness of sexual character is intrinsic to Bogarde, especially in his characterisation of himself; his extreme reluctance to be nailed down or pigeonholed is not only half of his charm, but also half the reason why he annoyed the hell out of some of his collaborators.

To me, in the late 1970s, Bogarde was the arche- ➤





Certainly Bogarde may have had cause to regret his role in 'The Night Porter' as the former concentration-camp officer reunited with the Jewish prisoner he kept for sexual purposes

THE SEDUCER
Bogarde's succès de scandale 'The Night Porter', top, built on hints of sexual impropriety in films such as 'The Sleeping Tiger', below left, and 'Victim', below right

typical stylish, sensitive Englishman of artistic bent, flirting with the grand bohemian decadence of the time. It was a great act, at which no one could touch him. Never mind that he was of mixed Flemish, Dutch and Scottish descent – he was christened Derek Jules Gaspard Ulric Niven van den Bogaerde. (As novelist Len Deighton famously observed, "All the best Englishmen have foreign names these days.") But any observant fan should have known that Bogarde was a flawed figure. His legendarily catty and rather whining television interview with Russell Harty in 1986 made him look like a miserable git, when his life seemed on the surface such a portrait of aesthetic bliss. But at the time I didn't know that his lifelong companion and manager Tony Forwood (always referred to by his surname in Bogarde's books) was slowly dying of Parkinson's disease and liver cancer. The keeping up of appearances so necessary to the movie-star life is, of course, at the heart of the Bogarde dilemma, and I was to learn that the lifestyle that I envied from afar – the pre-Peter Mayle Provençal idyll of his house in Grasse – was quite carefully contrived.

Indeed, the first thing one discovers in researching Bogarde is that the many eloquent books (seven memoirs, single collections of letters and journalism, and six novels) written by this complex, fascinating, contradictory, self-obsessed figure should come with a health warning. John Coldstream, in the introduction to his authorised 2004 biography of Bogarde, contradicts the actor-writer's claim that "it's all there in the books, if you know where to look. The lines are wide enough to read between." As Coldstream writes: "Dirk was a writer whose entire oeuvre became a fiction, thanks in large part to his hyperactive imagination and his fantasies – fantasies so vivid and powerful that they were, for him, a reality." No wonder he became a throwback icon of the style-obsessed era of the late 1970s and 80s, for he was a kind of prodigy of self-invention. That does not mean, however, that the realities of his life can be set aside in discussing his work, for his was a life lived in the heart of the contradiction of craved privacy and sought-after fame.

Rise from the Ranks

The teenage Bogarde had flirted with stage acting before he was called up for military service in World War II, making his West End stage debut in 1939 as Derek Bogaerde in J.B. Priestley's *Cornelius*. He also attended Chelsea College of Art. His own account of his wartime experiences, during which he gained a commission and ended up as an intelligence officer analysing aerial photographs, is riddled with cautious self-disparagement, but includes the claim that he was present at the liberation of Belsen concentration camp. This is now widely considered to have been one of his self-convincing fantasies. However, he did come out of the war with a feeling common among survivors of being inferior to those who died – though these occasional fits of self-loathing did not restrain the bumptious self-confidence with which he tackled his early acting roles on screen.

That was the way to get noticed in the British film industry of the time, and one of the most startling aspects of Bogarde's early career is how

quickly he evolved from the routine ingratiating young character actor we see in his feature debut, playing the groom in *Esther Waters* (1948), to the screen-commanding spiv hoodlum he plays in *The Blue Lamp* (1950). Already in this role, what Bogarde himself called his “absurdly boyish face” seems adored by the lens. His sympathy-seeking doe eyes, though, were then undermined by his gaping lips and poor teeth. (He would soon learn to keep his mouth clamped shut when in repose.) The quiff that connects the well-bred man of polished manners he was in reality to the Teddy Boys then emerging on London’s streets makes him seem ahead of his time, even if his cockney pronunciation of the word copper (“copahh”) sounds scarcely more authentic than Dick Van Dyke might have managed.

Over the next ten years, the young actor was burnished into bright British stardom under the Rank Organisation banner (though he always insisted he never attended the notorious ‘charm school’). This period in Bogarde’s life is the one he chronicled least. Secretaries handled all his correspondence – the mountains of fan letters and photo requests. Thus the published collection of his letters only begins with the transition period from Rank to what he called his ‘continental’ years. During his time at Rank, Bogarde became a full-time heart-throb celebrity and idol to thousands of British women – a position he fought desperately not to undermine throughout most of the rest of his life.

We can get some sense of what this did to him as an actor from Michael Powell’s autobiography *Million-Dollar Movie*. Apropos of Bogarde’s work in his 1957 film *Ill Met by Moonlight*, Powell wrote:

“I didn’t know that he was as subtle as a serpent, and with a will of steel... He knew all about me and actors, and he had absolutely no intention of acting in my film. He would smile (he had a charming smile), he would dress up (fancy-dress costume), he had a good figure (light and boyish), and he would speak the lines – or rather he would throw them away – with such careful art that camera and microphone would have to track in close... He would listen with attention to me while I told him what I wanted, and then would give me about a quarter of it.”

Watching *Ill Met by Moonlight* confirms much of what Powell says, but then the 36-year-old Bogarde may have known that he had been foisted by Rank on to Powell and his Archers partner Emeric Pressburger. Or was it that he was bored with playing war heroes in the Greek islands? (He’d given a much better performance three years earlier in Lewis Milestone’s *They Who Dare*, about a raid on Rhodes.) Set in 1944, *Ill Met by Moonlight* tells the true story of the kidnap of a German general by Patrick Leigh Fermor (the recently deceased travel writer), then a British intelligence officer organising the Greek resistance. As Leigh Fermor, Bogarde looks splendid throughout, and the camera loves him; but you can see he’s refusing to do more than be winsome, enigmatic and charming, while biding his time until the next film. The odd thing about this collaboration is that, outside the experience of the film itself, both Powell and Bogarde write about each other in the friendliest fashion.



THE DILETTANTE
On the WWII movie 'Ill Met by Moonlight', Bogarde frustrated director Michael Powell with his resolutely throwaway approach

The films I’ve seen from the Rank period vary wildly in quality, and can be enjoyed on many different levels. Bogarde shows sweet sensitivity as the eponymous lead in *The Spanish Gardener* (1956), a poor, pelota-playing local who helps the young son of a stuffy Englishman to gain confidence, but he looks as if he’s just come from a *West Side Story* audition. There are obvious kitsch excesses towards the end of the run, such as his hilariously camp turns as the brilliant pianist-composer Franz Liszt in *Song Without End* (1960) or a leather-clad western bandit in *The Singer Not the Song* (1961). He dominates every scene as a sadistic Naval lieutenant in *H.M.S. Defiant* (1962), but earned a reproof from his co-star Alec Guinness, who commented that Bogarde was like “no naval officer I ever met”, while socially he was “gay and amusing but pretty silly.”

But by then Bogarde had played the first redefining role of his career – a very courageous decision that was central to his identity. By starring in Basil Dearden’s *Victim* (1962) – as Melville Farr, a barrister who is determined to prosecute the blackmailers of homosexuals, only to be blackmailed himself because he too is sexually desirous of men – Bogarde deliberately undermined his own matinee-idol image and took the huge risk of allowing himself to be assumed to be homosexual, at a time when exposure as such might still lead to a prison sentence. The exact nature of Bogarde’s sexuality remains shrouded in a carefully nurtured ambiguity, though his devotion to Forwood was lifelong, and we would do well to remember how hard to prise open the closet door needed to be for his generation. But whatever his personal connection to the subject matter, this was a landmark passionate performance, and the film itself helped bring about the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in the UK. It also sparked a change in Bogarde’s career, firing his sudden need to pull out of what he called “the chrysalis of crap”.

The top of his game

The golden period of Dirk Bogarde’s film career begins with Joseph Losey’s *The Servant* (1963) and ends with Alain Resnais’s *Providence* (1977). The films that really matter are not that many in number, but together they contain the performances that define what it means to be able to act

thought on screen. The only other actor I’ve seen who’s as good at this as Bogarde is Helen Mirren (particularly in her portrayal of Detective Chief Inspector Jane Tennison in the occasional TV series *Prime Suspect*). Both Bogarde and Mirren do what I call the ‘weather face’ superbly well. Emotion is expressed wordlessly through convincingly subtle changes of facial expression: in small movements of the eyes, mouth and nostrils, in nervous swallows, in tiny tilts and swivels of the head, in flexings of unnoticed muscles (this kind of acting cannot be achieved, one imagines, by users of Botox). The effect is that these actors seem to be able to convey what’s going on behind the eyes. They can portray thought.

Bogarde’s characters usually grow from his own *soigné* persona. He’s imperious first, as if expecting a challenge, but behind that try-me-if-you-dare bravado, there is usually a wound of self-doubt or enthrallment to another. He has a cat’s ability to stare enigmatically, and his affected superciliousness can be wielded with cruelty. Losey had first worked with Bogarde on *The Sleeping Tiger* (1954), in which the actor plays an invited intruder (he tries to mug a psychologist, but the psychologist gets the better of him, and then invites him into his house to be a test case for reform). *The Servant* is a more sophisticated version of the same theme, in which a well-off young gentleman (James Fox) hires a butler named Barrett, who proceeds to take over his life by slow degrees.

As Barrett, Bogarde gives a brilliant, sly and menacing performance. He claimed to have based the character on a batman (a military officer’s personal servant) he’d had during the war. Bogarde’s anxiety about how he was perceived by the public is obvious in the way he described the role in a 1971 interview with *Films and Filming*: “It was enormous fun to do [but] it was no effort. It was entirely technical to act... Harold Pinter had written it so unfailingly that that you couldn’t put a foot wrong... It cost me very little emotionally, because I’m nothing to do with the man I played... So therefore it was much easier to expand my realms of fantasy and imagination and become a North Country bastard called Barrett.”

What *The Servant* revealed most tellingly was that the middle-aged Bogarde was now built to play sleaze as well as superiority, although it would

The Actors Dirk Bogarde



THE CONTINENTAL
From the top: Bogarde's work with Joseph Losey on 'The Servant' and 'Accident' paved the way for European art-movie stardom in 'Death in Venice'

take a while before the seamy roles became dominant. In *King & Country* (1964), for Losey again, he plays a frosty World War I military lawyer who tries to advise a simple-minded private (Tom Courtenay) under the threat of execution. John Schlesinger's *Darling* (1965) casts him as a television journalist who embarks on an affair with Julie Christie's superficial gold-digging it girl, only to be left in her wake.

My personal favourite of his mid-career roles is Stephen in Losey's *Accident* (1967), the married Oxford don who unwisely becomes besotted with one of his students who happens to be both an Austrian princess and the girlfriend of his protégé. A sexual tragedy of manners scripted, like *The Servant*, by Pinter, *Accident* makes Stephen's class anxieties look similar to those displayed by Bogarde himself. Stephen tries to engineer a tryst with the girl, but hasn't the guts to go through with it. Later he takes cruel advantage of the opportunity afforded him by the titular accident.

Bogarde himself worried about a real connection here. "In *Accident* I had to sublimate my own personal feelings," he told *Films and Filming*, "because I don't believe in actors *being*—actors have got to act. The character... is a really gentle man. A loser-out. A quiet man who is lost and settles for something. I'm a loser but we all are, aren't we? I was very aware of the emotions of the man... and I was almost in a trance for about four months after I finished it." (In another version of the story, however, it only took him a few hours to shake off the character.)

At the heart of my slow disenchantment with Bogarde the man is the matter of class. The way he always writes about Luchino Visconti, the Italian aristocrat who gave him two of his key later roles, reeks of the snobbery of the lower middle class—that combination of reverence for nobility combined with hatred of parvenus. In Bogarde's version, he and Visconti—as superior beings—understood each other naturally, without needing to communicate. As Frederic Raphael put it, "Dirk appeared set on proving that first class was never quite good enough for him."

Anyone so determined (in his books and letters) to constantly assert his superiority over others is surely angsty about his own true status. Bogarde's memoirs positively throb with anxiety about guests, both pleasing them and getting rid of them—a by-product, I suppose, of the contradiction between his generosity and his much-trumpeted shyness. The often purple prose is served with lashings of *poshlust*, a diet I now find too rich. And the gushing letters can be worse, as full of capitals and underlinings as a teenage girl's diary.

But none of that can take away anything of Bogarde's acting talent. All his traits and abilities are put to their utmost dissipated use in the operatic Italian films he made around the start of the 1970s: Visconti's *The Damned* (1969) and *Death in Venice* (1971), and Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter* (1974). In the *Macbeth*-like scene in *The Damned* where Ingrid Thulin encourages Bogarde's industrial magnate to murder the head of the Von Essenbeck family so he can take over their steel corporation under the Nazis, Bogarde projects a stream of frantic emotions communicated in one storming flow of cajolement and entreaty as he

crosses the room towards her. This role was meant to be a pinnacle of Bogarde's achievement, but emphasis was moved by Visconti away from his character towards the mad, beautiful young industrial heir played by Helmut Berger. "It was a rotten part," Bogarde later commented, "difficult because there was no substance to it, but the magic of working with Visconti made it absolutely worthwhile... My character was swamped, but then it was supposed to be swamped. There were two parts of consequence in the film [Thulin's and Berger's] and I didn't have one of them."

His reward for accepting this downgrading was the lead in Visconti's next feature, an adaptation of Thomas Mann's novella *Death in Venice*. This was a cult film of its time (one that I alternately adored and disliked). All that aesthetic pile-up—the 'Adagio' from Mahler's 5th Symphony; the enchantment of twilight on the Venice lagoon and the city itself; the comic absurdity behind the elderly composer's supposedly purely aesthetic adoration of Tadzio, the young Polish boy in the bathing suit; the painstaking beauty of the pre-World War I good life—was either intoxicating or indigestible, depending on one's mood or predilection. Visconti's removal of the novella's interior monologue strips the film of meaning, but Bogarde does a brilliant job of trying to reinvest the composer's tremulous emotions, culminating in the unforgettable beach scene where he sweats away his life as his make-up cracks and the hair dye starts to run.

It would be tempting to end the Bogarde story there, with what he clearly thought was the pinnacle of his career. Certainly he may have had cause to regret his role in *The Night Porter* as the former concentration-camp officer who is reunited with the Jewish prisoner he previously kept for his own sexual purposes. Susan Sontag picked on this film and *The Damned* as egregious examples of the 1970s interest in "Fascinating Fascism". Certainly *The Night Porter* plays both ends against the middle of this argument; if you agree with Sontag that "fascist art glorifies surrender... [and] glamorises death", and that "never before was the relation of masters to slaves so consciously aestheticized", then *The Night Porter* certainly follows those precepts, even if it does so in order to show their bankruptcy.

What sort of career Bogarde thought might follow *Death in Venice* needn't concern us here, but it's obvious that his concentrated interest fell away when the great parts and scripts either didn't come his way, or didn't seem good enough when they did. His run at the top of his game ended with Alain Resnais's *Providence*, in which he plays the son of John Gielgud's dying writer, seen by his father as estranged, ridiculous and disappointing. The film is constructed around a contemporary bourgeois house party, and in Bogarde's performance you can see a more relaxed, less operatic style at work, that's classier than ever. What a shame there wasn't more from him in this vein.

■ A Dirk Bogarde season plays at BFI Southbank, London, throughout August and September. Six of his early films, including 'Esther Waters', 'The Spanish Gardener' and 'The Singer Not the Song', have recently been released on DVD. John Coldstream's BFI Film Classic on 'Victim' has just been published

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GREEN SCREEN

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO IRISH CINEMA



*The economy may be shattered, but Ireland's filmmakers continue to come up with the goods. **Trevor Johnston** surveys the current Irish scene and, overleaf, talks to John Michael McDonagh about his new film 'The Guard'*

To begin, some Hibernian local colour. This is more of an apocryphal tale than anything specifically cinematic, but you'll take the point. Picture the scene: weary English motorists, utterly lost in the wilds of Ireland, find themselves on some impossibly scenic, signage-free single-track road. Help is on hand, however, when they spot a horny-handed son of the turf by the wayside, roll down the window and ask for directions to their destination. Said local denizen gives the travellers a benign yet sceptical glance, scratches his head and tells them: "Ah sure now, you wouldn't want to start from here..."

That's a one-liner which sums up the current position of the Irish film industry. The country's in economic meltdown. The home market can't by itself support feature-film production. Finding finance from broadcast partners is near impossible in Ireland and almost as daunting abroad. So every single producer is reliant on the crucial contribu-

tion of Bord Scannán na hEireann, the Irish Film Board – the national film agency whose annual budget looks under threat as the government tries to meet its huge debt commitments. No, you definitely wouldn't want to start from here...

In the meantime, though, the hits just keep on coming. Enjoyed at Sundance, Berlin and the Edinburgh opening night, John Michael McDonagh's frolicsome Connemara cop movie *The Guard* is exactly the sort of thing that Irish cinema does best. The inestimable Brendan Gleeson is in his pomp as the small-town constable cocking a snook at the criminal fraternity and his own superiors when a drug-smuggling investigation pairs his uniformed rebel with Don Cheadle's strait-laced FBI investigator. Riffing on procedural and buddy-flick staples, its widescreen bogscapes and Calixto's Morricone-influenced score remind us of the elemental moral verities of the Old West, while McDonagh's deliciously piercing dialogue nails a modern Ireland in thrall to half-digested political correctness and glib TV-show buzzwords.

Actor-friendly, writer-led, bristling with attitude – and bloody funny to boot – it's a film whose lineage can be traced back through several other defiantly Irish left-field crime pics. For starters, there's the philosophical hitmen-abroad caper *In Bruges*, which showed lauded playwright Martin McDonagh (yes, the brother of *The Guard*'s writer-director John Michael) transferring his skills from stage to celluloid. Lagging behind is the admittedly somewhat strained gangland pile-up *Perrier's Bounty* (in which writer Mark O'Rowe didn't quite match the frisky insouciance of his 2003 tyro effort *Intermission*). Going way back to 1997, a time when there were few Irish films of any stripe, Conor McPherson's knowing, absurdist, slow-burning screenplay for Paddy Breathnach's *I Went Down* now looks like it set the template for what's followed in offering a distinctive local spin on familiar US genre moves (and a great role for Gleeson). It also, moreover, set another acclaimed man of the theatre off on a subsequently bifurcated career path, as McPherson thenceforth divided his time between the Dublin/London/Broadway stage and directing his own small-scale, intriguing and hard-to-classify films like *Saltwater* (1999) and *The Eclipse* (2009).

Factor in the sleeper success of John Carney's loveable micro-budget muso romance *Once* (2007), and Lenny Abrahamson's subtly devastating portraits of social outsiders in *Adam and Paul* (2004) and *Garage* (2007), and a wider sense of Ireland's burgeoning filmmaking profile emerges. Indeed, the Irish Film Board stamp on such critical and cultural landmarks as John Boorman's splendid true-crime shaggy dog story *The General* (1998), Peter Mullan's affecting exposé *The Magdalene Sisters* (2002) and Paul Greengrass's *Bloody Sunday* (2001) – the brilliantly mounted historical recreation that put his career on the path to *Bourne* sequels – confirms that here's a cinematic nation definitely punching above its weight.

In terms of Irish filmmakers being able to pursue their vision on an international level, Neil Jordan and Jim Sheridan were evidently the pioneers. But the presence of invaluable state support – not to mention a pool of assured performers (including Gleeson, Colin Farrell, Gabriel Byrne, Cillian Murphy et al) – has helped make Ireland a distinctive player on the global film scene, where until the mid-1990s there was little resembling a film industry at all. The country's recent fiscal calamities have seen a certain amount of derision visited on the home of yesteryear's Celtic Tiger, but the filmmaking community continues to weather the storm, its confidence bolstered by the continuation of film-production tax breaks until 2015 and a cut of only 4 per cent off the Irish Film Board's grant for 2011. Looking ahead to next year, well, nobody really knows...

As for what exactly 'an Irish film' might look or smell like, that's another imponderable, though if you ask around, there's definitely a sense that Irish cinema remains very much indie-focused and, in the broadest sense, a writerly affair, since it's the likes of the McDonagh brothers, McPherson and O'Rowe who have garnered the attention of late. "We're a loquacious people – our theatrical tradition reflects that," avers stalwart Dublin-based producer Robert Walpole, who's been working with McPherson since *I Went Down*. "The way we use the English language is very much our own – it's something to do with those Gaelic construc-

WARTS AND ALL
Brendan Gleeson in 'The Guard', the latest in a string of recent Irish films offering a wry look at modern life on the Emerald Isle, including, from left to right, 'Adam and Paul', 'The Eclipse' and 'Once'

GETTING AHEAD OF YOURSELF

Director John Michael McDonagh tells **Trevor Johnston** how he gave the police procedural an Irish spin in *'The Guard'*

Trevor Johnston: The whole story of *'The Guard'* revolves around the title character, the small-town west of Ireland cop played by Brendan Gleeson. Was he the starting point for the writing?

John Michael McDonagh: Yes, you had this guy Gerry Boyle who was basically the antithesis of everything politically correct, so it was really a question of asking yourself who he might offend the most. An American? Obviously. A black American? Even more so. Of course, you could have taken it even further and made his foil a lesbian, but there was enough there already to be getting on with. The whole thing was really written in opposition to so many police-procedural movies and TV shows like the *CSI* franchise, where they're dusting for prints and doing infra-red and that's how crimes are solved. My process was really about imagining what that sort of genre item would do in each scene – and then doing exactly the opposite.

TJ: The whole anti-authoritarian aspect to Boyle also seems rooted in place, and the particular attitudes you might encounter in the west of Ireland.

JMM: I grew up in South London, but my family's from Connemara so I'd be going back there each summer, and it struck me that the sense of humour's pretty much the same in those two places. They're very quick to take you down a peg if they think you're getting ahead of yourself. There's the sarcasm, the deadpan delivery, the whole notion that you're not going to come over there and tell them how to do things – which is pretty much how Boyle relates to Don Cheadle's character, the FBI man. There's an anti-Dublin feeling in Connemara, which is reflected in the film as well. The whole attitude in Dublin is basically that they control the country, politically, financially and culturally. But where did it get them? They've brought the place to its knees – that's where it got them.

TJ: Don Cheadle has this repeated line about Brendan Gleeson's character: he's not sure whether he's incredibly smart or incredibly dumb. As the filmmaker, you have to guide the audience on this, so where do you stand?

JMM: For me and for Brendan as well, it was all about the duality of Gerry Boyle – the difference between the public and private faces. He knows he's always the smartest guy in the room, but he doesn't show it. He's not a racist, but he knows everyone else in the room is, and so he acts as a sort of agent provocateur to bring that out.

TJ: You're using humour to poke fun at prejudice, but it does suggest that racist attitudes are still part of the picture, particularly when you get to rural Ireland?

JMM: There's definitely a sort of naive racism in some parts of Ireland. Here's a people who emigrated to every corner of the globe, but the minute a few Romanians turn up on their own



OPPOSITES ATTRACT
The directorial debut of John Michael McDonagh, top, sets un-PC cop Brendan Gleeson, right, against easily offendable FBI agent Don Cheadle, left

doorstep, there's a big hoo-ha. It's 2011 – it's time to get over the 60s naivety. We've all got Sky telly now – it's a window on the world.

TJ: There's a very black, knowing sort of wit to your film that's not a million miles away from your brother Martin McDonagh's film *'In Bruges'*. Any sibling rivalry there?

JMM: I don't mind the comparisons, really, because if you like that film, the chances are you'll get this one. In a way it's not surprising that there's a bit of an overlap, because we lived together until we were 26 or something. Our parents went back to Ireland, but we stayed in the house in Camberwell. On the dole, reading the same books, watching the same Barbara Stanwyck seasons on Channel 4 in the afternoons. I never begrudged [Martin] his success in the theatre, because the theatre doesn't interest me in the slightest, but when he got the money to do his short *Six Shooter*, won the Oscar

'My process was about imagining what CSI would do in each scene – and then doing exactly the opposite'



for it, then did *In Bruges*, I have to say that the old stomach ulcer of jealousy started firing up. Now that I've done *The Guard*, it's all gone. But for a while there...

TJ: There's a few years between your screenwriting credit on Gregor Jordan's 2003 version of *'Ned Kelly'* and this one. Are we talking 'development hell'?

JMM: Well, that was a lesson. Everyone tells you that as a first-time screenwriter you have to be very accommodating, because you're going to get your movie made. What a load of shite. There is no positive aspect whatsoever to having your name on a bad film. The one advantage was that the money bought me some time I could put into writing the next one for me to direct myself, which was a script called *War on Everyone*, another black comedy set in the Southern states of the US. That was something which was taking a while to set up, so I actually went away and wrote *The Guard* quite quickly just to have a break from it. We got Brendan Gleeson and Don Cheadle on board, and the whole thing happened really quickly. I shot pretty much my first draft a matter of months after writing it.

I'm still hopeful that the other project will go next, but I've also written a film about a country priest, which Brendan Gleeson is also on board with. It's called *Calvary* and there's a touch of Bresson in there. It's more contemplative – though usually that's not the kind of film I enjoy myself at all. I need a bit of story, and if it doesn't turn up in the first 15 minutes, I'm outta there!

tions. So when we come to look at, say, the traditional American crime film, we can give it our own particular style. The next big thing for us is to take that a step further and fully embrace the fact that cinema's a visual medium."

In that respect, *The Guard* is certainly moving in a more cine-literate direction than its Celtic crime-pic forebears, thanks in no small part to a bold approach to colour in the production design and the care with which John Michael McDonagh arranges the Scope framing. McDonagh may be slightly sheepish ("This may sound really pretentious, but...") when revealing that he pored over his Antonioni DVDs, plus John Ford's *Cavalry Trilogy* and the Preston Sturges classics for their ensemble feel, before prepping the film with DP Larry Smith (who shot *Eyes Wide Shut* for Kubrick and *Bronson* for Nicolas Winding Refn). But he's certainly bolshy when decrying what he sees as an alarming lack of directorial awareness and panache elsewhere in his countrymen's cinematic output. "You'd think some of these people had never actually seen any great cinema before they went out and shot this stuff," he fulminates. And just don't get him started on *Perrier's Bounty*...

The exception in McDonagh's eyes – and indeed for this writer the great Irish film of the century thus far – is Lenny Abrahamson's *Garage*. Written by Mark O'Halloran, it's the poised and compassionate tale of a slow-witted, lonely mechanic – brilliantly played by popular TV comedian Pat Shortt (he also pops up as a cowboy-hatted IRA functionary in *The Guard*) – whose longing to fit in with the everyday social interaction the rest of us take for granted eventually proves his undoing. Abrahamson's 2004 feature debut, the Dublin junkie chronicle *Adam and Paul* (also scripted by O'Halloran), had an unsentimental empathy for those struggling to find their place in the world. *Garage* built on its strengths, crafting a genuine piece of European auteur cinema.

In fact, such is the regard in which Abrahamson is held by Element Pictures, the Dublin company involved in both his features to date, that producer Ed Guiney has formed a splinter operation, Element A, to develop projects solely for him – among them a murder story set in Dublin's wealthy South Side (which could be shooting this winter), an arthouse comedy set in the world of avant-garde music (co-written by Jon Ronson and Peter Straughan) and *Hunger* scriptwriter Enda Walsh's adaptation of *Into That Darkness*, Gitta Sereny's examination of Holocaust culpability.

One would hope that the McDonagh siblings, Walsh and McPherson may still have their best film work ahead of them (and let's not write the cinematic obituaries for Messrs Jordan and

'We're not good at banking. We're shite at property. We've fucked it up. But one of the things we are good at is culture'

Sheridan just yet). But from the present vantage point, it does seem as though the story of Irish cinema over the next few years may be shaped in part by the degree to which Lenny Abrahamson shifts up or down through the gears. Guiney describes him as a "once-in-a-lifetime talent", a statement that almost automatically has one casting around for who else might be coming through, and wondering how they might be nurtured. In the commercial arena, the smart money is on duo James Mather and Stephen St Leger, who've been shooting the action thriller *Lockout* for producer Luc Besson in Belgrade, prior to completing post-production and CGI work on the Guy Pearce-starrer in Dublin.

They'll no doubt be the first Irish talents since Dundalk-born John Moore (*Behind Enemy Lines*, the *Flight of the Phoenix* remake) to impact greatly on the multiplex mainstream, though from animation (Tomm Moore and Nora Twomey's characterfully drawn *The Secret of Kells*) to the documentary fields (the gender portraiture of Ken Wardrop's *His & Hers*; Risteard O'Domhnaill's extraordinary vivid record of a small community taking on corporate oil in *The Pipe*), there's evident endeavour in a variety of contexts. Juanita Wilson's Bosnian-war drama *As If I'm Not There* (reviewed on p.55) and the recent splash made in the Cannes Director's Fortnight by *The Other Side of Sleep*, first-timer Rebecca Daly's brooding story of sleepwalking and murder in an Offaly village, also point to a welcome flourish of female directorial flair.

For now, the economic mayhem – and indeed the arrival of new chief executive James Hickey at the Irish Film Board (taking over from Europhile Brit Simon Perry) – have put the focus back on the centrality of the IFB and its support for the modestly budgeted independent dramas that are the Irish industry's stock-in-trade. A cursory glance through the list of funding decisions posted on their website shows a steady flow of development grants and production coin to the major production-company players on the Dublin scene, whose output – all and sundry readily affirm – would simply be untenable without it. As Hickey's deputy Teresa McGrane explains, the IFB is

involved in many projects from the initial idea, through development, financing assistance and production support, to sales, festival and marketing strategy. "Without an agency like ours, which has the expertise and the financial resources to put this into action, local production absolutely wouldn't happen," she says.

Which means that all eyes are on their decisions. From those interested parties contacted in the course of researching this piece, there seems to be a groundswell of opinion that the IFB has been handing out cash too easily to projects that weren't ready for primetime and had scant chance of connecting with the marketplace. "They funded 28 films in 2008!" exclaimed one independent producer, who wanted to remain anonymous. "There was never an audience for 28 Irish arthouse films in one year!"

To be fair, McGrane herself admits that 2008 was an exception that will never be repeated, but the much respected Ed Guiney (whose ambitious Element Pictures outfit has also co-produced the likes of Jerzy Skolimowski's *Essential Killing* and Paolo Sorrentino's recent Cannes contender *This Must Be the Place*) is willing to put his head above the parapet: "I might get shot for saying this, but I think the IFB has funded too many films in the past. I'd like to see them making fewer films and taking larger bets on the films that they do make."

McGrane hints about "setting the bar higher", suggesting that some policy adjustment may be in the offing, while also pointing to the tax-break extension and the IFB's virtually unscathed budget for the current year as an indication that the battle for state recognition of the industry's economic worth – and its arguably more intangible cultural worth – has pretty much been won. As Guiney puts it: "We're not good at banking. We're shite at property. We've fucked it up. But one of the things we are good at is culture. So let's look after that and help it grow."

"Back in the early 90s when I was starting out, the very idea that you could even make a film in Ireland was like a mad thought," Guiney concludes. "But the ambition has moved on. It's not just a matter of simply making films – we've got to be creating cinema which fulfils its ambition and knows who its audience is. We can't sustain ourselves on the Irish market alone, so we have to be looking outwards. I used to say that the Americans all think we're leprechauns, the Brits think we're terrorists, but in Europe it's like: 'Aah, Samuel Beckett and James Joyce... Veeerrrry interesting!' Obviously, that's where you want to be."

■ *'The Guard'* is released on 19 August, and is reviewed on page 61

BREAKING BAD
Recent Irish cinema has specialised in downbeat crime movies including *'In Bruges'* – with the indispensable Brendan Gleeson, far left – and *'Perrier's Bounty'*, left



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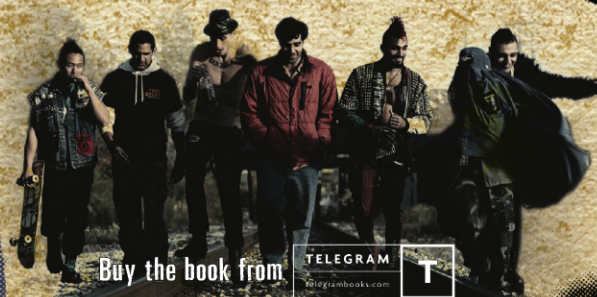
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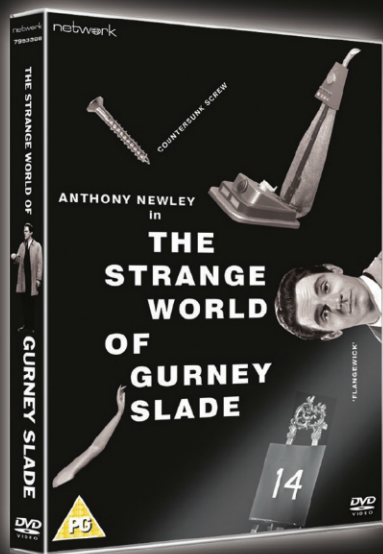


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.....
The Devil's Double Dominic Cooper is
chillingly effective in the twin roles of
Uday Hussein and Latif Yahia, presented
with old-fashioned stagecraft rather
than new-fangled digital trickery **p60**
.....

Chicago hope

The new film from 'Hoop Dreams' director Steve James, *The Interrupters* chronicles a daring initiative to tackle violence on the streets of Chicago. It's as compelling as *The Wire*, says **Michael Brooke** – and it's all true

The Interrupters

Steve James, 2011

"The story about sticks and stones may break your bones but words can never hurt you? Words are gonna get you killed." Ameena Matthews has already demonstrated her understanding of this claim's essential truth by stepping in to break up a fight that started with a young man's front teeth getting punched out and was threatening to escalate into something much nastier with the appearance of a butcher knife. That this was unexpectedly caught on camera might seem like a stroke of luck for filmmaker Steve James, were it not for the fact that he was spending a year documenting Chicago's street violence problem, in the course of which encountering a real-life example was statistically far from unlikely.

James's highest-profile film since *Hoop Dreams* (1994), *The Interrupters* began life as an 8,000-word *New York Times* feature by Alex Kotlowitz, who is credited alongside James as the film's producer. Published in May 2008, 'Blocking the Transmission of Violence' examined attempts to find credible solutions to Chicago's relentless toll of shootings – a problem exacerbated by a street code of honour demanding swift vigilante justice. One person featured in the article was epidemiologist Gary Slutkin, who had returned to his native Chicago convinced that techniques of disease prevention he'd utilised in Somalia and Uganda could be applied at home, since he regarded street violence as having similar symptoms to an epidemic (it's certainly the major cause of death for young people in some parts of the city). Slutkin believed that, as with Aids or cholera, encouraging behavioural changes would be far more effective in the long term than medicines or bandages.

Accordingly he founded the community-level campaigning organisation CeaseFire in 2000. In March 2004, CeaseFire started hiring 'Violence Interrupters' – people who would use their often



We're given a full portrait of the hijab-wearing Ameena, from her family background to early flirtation with crime to conversion to Islam

considerable clout as either gangland royalty (Ameena is the daughter of Jeff Fort, a high-profile Chicago gang leader imprisoned for domestic terrorism) or veterans of lengthy prison sentences for serious crimes (Ameena's colleagues Cobe Williams and Eddie Bocanegra, among others).

The theory was that the Interrupters would be far more persuasive than official authority figures, because they self-evidently came from the same background, shared the same concerns and spoke the same language as the people on the street. (In the interests of clarity, *The Interrupters*

occasionally uses subtitles, though they're sparser and less patronising than with many similar documentaries.) As one Interrupter points out in a meeting in the film: "We've got over 500 years of prison time at this table. That's a lot of fuckin' wisdom."

Inspired by Kotlowitz's article, Steve James spent a year (from summer 2009 to spring 2010) following Ameena, Cobe and Eddie, interviewing them and their colleagues (notably Tio Hardiman, founder of the Violence Interrupters programme) and recording Interrupters meetings. Unusually for a lengthy

documentary about an important social issue, James almost entirely ignores politicians and the police; although *The Interrupters* has garnered justifiable comparisons with HBO's TV drama series *The Wire* (2002-8), it mostly stays at street level. Jesse Jackson can be glimpsed briefly at a vigil, while Chicago's Mayor Richard M. Daley, US Attorney General Eric Holder and US Education Secretary Arne Duncan deliver soundbites at a press conference following the widely YouTube'd murder of 16-year-old Derrion Albert; but that's pretty much it.

Aside from passing patrol cars, the police are even less visible, and Eddie admits that he prefers it this way. The nature of the Interrupters' work means that they often have to make snap judgements about what they're interrupting – and their overwhelming priority is to prevent violence. If this cannot be done without allowing concurrent criminal activity to continue, then so be it. Early in the film, Cobe chats to two hooded youths who casually brag about recent crimes, aware that Cobe has himself served a dozen years in prison for drug trafficking and is therefore unlikely to turn them in.

The film offers detailed profiles of Ameena, Cobe and Eddie, which for once don't amount to biographical padding. We're given a full portrait of the hijab-wearing Ameena, from her family background to early flirtation with crime to conversion to Islam and marriage to the imam of the Al-Haqqani mosque. (One of the film's few uncomplicated pleasures is the sight of four red-turbaned men roller-dancing in formation at Ameena's daughter's birthday party.) This background helps illustrate both why she became an Interrupter in the first place, and why she's so good at a job that demands reserves of physical courage, resourcefulness and seemingly infinite patience – as well as the ability to segue seamlessly from huddled one-to-one conversations to crowd-calming speeches. The likeably garrulous Cobe and the wiry, intense Eddie are depicted in similar detail, with the latter's





LIFE LESSONS

The past crimes of *Interrupters* such as Cobe Williams, above, give them insight into the street violence they now try to prevent. Facing page, top: Ameena with Caprysha; below: Cobe, Eddie and Tio

Latino origins and the presence of white *Interrupters* at group meetings confirming that the violence isn't exclusively black on black.

Besides profiling the aims of the Violence Interrupter programme as a whole, the film follows the trio's handling of a number of individual cases, tracked over several months. These include the Oliver family, whose matriarch Latoya has fled from her sons Kenneth and Bud (a third, unnamed son is in jail until 2016) by moving house without their knowledge; teenagers Caprysha Anderson and Lil Mikey Davis, both already veterans of correctional institutions; and hot-headed Flamo, itching to pay back the perpetrators of an alleged frame-up. The *Interrupters* also attend vigils for victims and talk to families, friends, relatives and witnesses, all too aware that this is the time when decisions to exact revenge are often irrevocably taken.

The mediation process is painstaking, involving long and potentially fruitless conversations

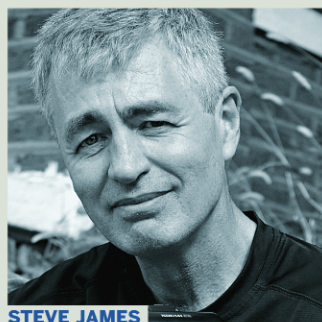
A question of trust

Steve James on gaining access to the world of *'The Interrupters'*

In any long-term filming process, trust between filmmakers and subjects becomes paramount – the key to access and intimacy. It didn't happen overnight – it rarely does. In this film, the initial challenges were for people in the communities to understand that the film crew wasn't tied to the police, and that the *Interrupters'* real focus in any mediation was on helping them, not filming them.

We had an understanding with our *Interrupters* that if a situation seemed potentially too dangerous, or if our being there would compromise the mediation, we would stand down. This became an issue with Eddie in one of the Latino neighbourhoods beset by gangs, when he was told that we weren't welcome there anymore.

The more time we spent hanging with our *Interrupters* even when a crisis wasn't imminent – going to Cobe's son's football games or Ameena's daughter's birthday party – the more comfortable they became with us and the camera. That then translated to the streets, where it was important that people understood why we were there, why we wanted to film them. Ultimately they trusted the *Interrupters* and



STEVE JAMES

believed we were not there to vilify and judge, but to illuminate and understand. That's pretty much been my guiding principle as a filmmaker, and Alex [Kotlowitz]'s as a writer. Nowhere was that more true than with this film.

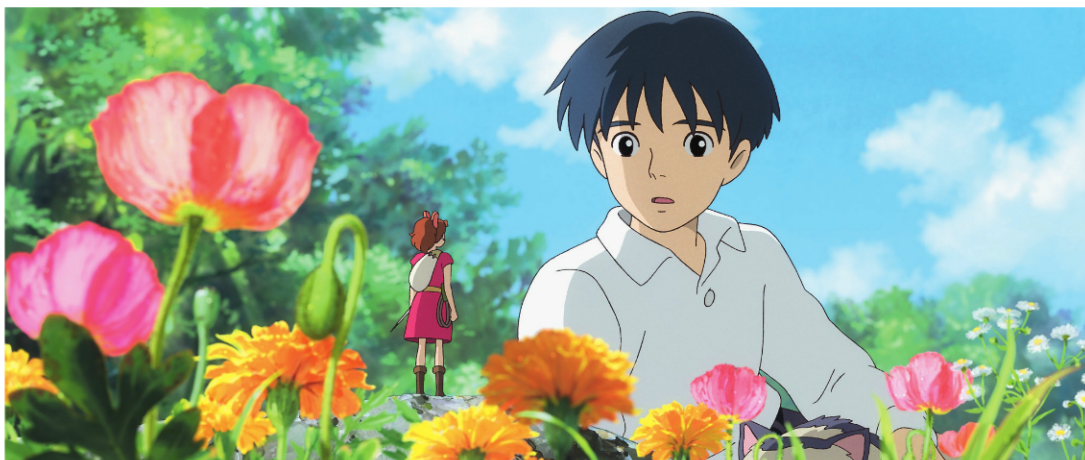
Making *'The Interrupters'* was a gift. I became a documentary filmmaker because I wanted to understand people and communities other than the ones I've lived in. The best film experiences are akin to living inside a rich and surprising novel. Your own personal life and day-to-day worries tend to recede and pale in comparison as you bear witness to the lives and often profound struggles of others.

(Tio confirms that "you have to immerse yourself in the bullshit") and attempts at reconciliation that might well backfire. Latoya says little when reunited with her sons, but her body language could be highlighted in neon. Lil Mikey is palpably nervous before his face-to-face apology to the victims of the armed robbery that got him locked up for nearly three years. Cobe is visibly surprised that Flamo turns his life around, and Ameena is doggedly determined to keep Caprysha on track despite her parole violations. Meanwhile Eddie himself decides to spend a day doing spontaneous good deeds to mark the anniversary of the murder for which he served 14 years.

The Interrupters is a heavyweight film about a heavyweight subject of clear interest well beyond the United States. (While the youth-crime statistics emerging from Britain's cities may not be quite as hair-raising, they nonetheless show a similar upward trend.) It was clearly made under difficult and potentially dangerous conditions, and James's invisibility (the camera is barely alluded to) raises inevitable questions about the process by which he gained his subjects' trust – presumably the subject of a DVD extra or two. It wears its length surprisingly lightly (it's shorter than *Hoop Dreams*, but still nearer three hours than two), with individual sequences cut to the quick. Close-ups of an *Interrupter's* missing finger, iced-over children's toys in front of a makeshift street memorial, or the graffitied "I AM NEXT" on a blank brick in a memorial wall, convey as much information as entire conversations.

With interviews and occasional TV and radio news inserts doubling as narration, there's only one occasion when the film feels forced. It may well have been the case during filming that a shopping mall's muzak track serendipitously launched into Pachelbel's 'Canon' at the precise moment when Ameena is giving Caprysha an uplifting pep talk, but it feels too pat. The film also lacks *Hoop Dreams'* heart-in-mouth narrative arc, but that's because the earlier film's protagonists had sufficient talent at basketball to have at least a plausible chance of breaking out of their environment; here, by contrast, James focuses on those who remain straitjacketed within it. In the world of *The Interrupters*, the mere achievement of securing and holding down a job makes for a low-key but oddly triumphant conclusion.

For credits and synopsis, see page 66



Something borrowed: 'Arrietty'

Arrietty

Japan 2010

Director: Yonebayashi Hiromasa

Certificate U 94m 16s

Arrietty is a Japanese animated version of Mary Norton's children's book *The Borrowers*, published in 1952. It's the story of a family of tiny people, living in the walls and under the floorboards of the human world. Even transposed to Tokyo, with Japanese sensibilities, the story remains familiar, having been adapted and readapted over the years; there was a British-American live-action film in 1997, with John Goodman and Jim Broadbent, and the BBC has recently announced a version for next Christmas, featuring Christopher Eccleston and Stephen Fry.

The traditionally drawn *Arrietty* is animated by the Tokyo studio Ghibli, which made *Spirited Away* (2002). The studio's most famous director, Miyazaki Hayao, chose the book and helped adapt it, though *Arrietty*'s director is Yonebayashi Hiromasa, previously a Ghibli animator. *Arrietty* isn't the lushest Ghibli film – some of its opening shots look rather functional – but the studio is still masterful at leading viewers into its hand-drawn worlds. The film's environment is half wild, half domestic: outdoors there are untended gardens and dangerous predators; home space is precious, even to the restless, inquisitive Borrower girl Arrietty. Her family 'borrow' materials from the human world, but they must still shape, craft and mend their living space; it would be calamitous if they had to move.

Ghibli's version is a girl's rite of passage and "a love story of the type one might find in an ordinary girl's comic" (which is how Miyazaki described Ghibli's 1995 film *Whisper of the Heart*). The first scenes depict Arrietty's relationship with her taciturn but kind father, whom she idolises as he climbs the vast walls and furniture of the echoing human world. Her father is taking the 13-year-old on her first borrowing expedition, using nails as footholds and a thread pulley as an elevator. Then, disaster – Arrietty is seen by Sho, a young human who has moved into the house, and who is

perhaps the first boy she's seen. The calm giant tells her there's nothing to fear. The experience shocks, enrages and (naturally) fascinates the adolescent. There's also a plotline about an excitable housemaid hunting for the Borrowers, but the film reduces her to a dangerous idiot. Ghibli films rarely have true villains, though westerners may wonder why *Arrietty* isn't more of an adventure story, like the 1997 film.

The conflict, such as it is, is between Arrietty's spirited determination to prevail in a perilous world, and the peaceable Sho whom – we learn later – has a romantically fatalistic philosophy. Sho's character is feminised in a manner familiar in Japanese animation, though a feistier wild-boy Borrower is introduced to draw a contrast.

Judged against other Ghibli films, the main thing *Arrietty* lacks is spontaneity, a scene to compare to (for example) the impromptu violin performance of John Denver's 'Take Me Home, Country

Roads' in *Whisper of the Heart* (1995), or a girl bounding on giant waves in 2008's *Ponyo on the Cliff* (Yonebayashi supervised the latter scene). Ghibli fans may complain that too much of *Arrietty* feels familiar – the intrepid teen heroine, the oversized world – but Ghibli's main concern is captivating young viewers, not satisfying adult fans. Even the Ghibli classics of the 1980s recycled images and ideas from Japanese cartoons of earlier decades.

Arrietty's most distinctive element is its Celtic-flavoured score by the French singer/harpist Cécile Corbel and her collaborators, with snatches of English lyrics based on poems by the director. The music may not appeal to all tastes, but the film's chief virtues are those at Ghibli's core; a charming, absorbing story, set in a vividly realised drawn world. **Andrew Osmond** *'Arrietty' is released in subtitled and English-dubbed versions; this review is based on the subtitled film.*

CREDITS

Producers
Suzuki Toshio
English-language
Version:
Frank Marshall
**Development and
Screenplay**
Miyazaki Hayao
Based on the book *The
Borrowers* by Mary
Norton
**Supervising
Animators**
Yamashita Akihiko
Kagawa Megumi

Animation Studio
Studio Ghibli
Editor
Rie Matsubara
Art Directors
Takeshige Yoji
Yoshida Noboru
Music
Cécile Corbel
Sound Designer
Kasamatsu Koji

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Dentsu Inc., Hakuhodo
DY Media Partners,
Mitsubishi Corporation,
NTV, Studio Ghibli, Toho

Production Company
Studio Ghibli presents a
film by Yonebayashi
Hiromasa
Executive Producer
Hoshino Koji

VOICE CAST

English-language
version
Amy Poehler
Homily
Will Arnett
Pod
Bridgit Mendler
Arrietty

Carol Burnett
Sadako
David Henrie
Sho
Peter Jason
pest controller

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Optimum Releasing

8,484 ft +0 frames

Japanese theatrical title
Karigurashi no Arrietty

The Art of Getting By

USA 2011

Director: Gavin Wiesen

Certificate 12A 83m 14s

From *Finding Neverland* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* to *Arthur and the Invisibles*, *The Golden Compass* and *The Spiderwick Chronicles*, British actor Freddie Highmore has been the go-to child star for every recent kid-centred fantasy blockbuster around (except the most obvious ones).

The Art of Getting By sees him move into teenage roles as George, a talented but non-committal student in a well-to-do Upper Manhattan school. Haunted by the certainty of his eventual death, George questions the utility of doing his homework. He can eloquently summarise artistic devices in Thomas Hardy for his English teacher (Alicia Silverstone), but never bothers to complete any of his assignments. He doodles incessantly but – to the frustration of his art tutor, who is convinced of George's dormant talent – can't summon the conviction to try his hand at more ambitious painting. Instead, he's mastered the art of getting by, never putting himself on the line, feeling secure in his own solipsism.

This makes for an infuriatingly insipid protagonist, and Highmore's frigid performance settles for posture, doing nothing to bring him to life. George is no more effective in his love life: despite being close enough to classmate Sally (Emma Roberts) for other people to assume they're going out, George never makes his move, passively convinced that she couldn't be interested in him. In one scene, they go to a restaurant together on Valentine's Day (ostensibly as single friends) and Sally bites the bullet and proposes that they have sex; George responds only with a bewildered stare. His one assertive gesture, to challenge his secretly unemployed stepfather Jack (Sam Robards) about why he's sitting in cheap cafés during office hours, strikes an incongruously cruel note. The film assumes 84 minutes of dramatic interest in George's easy-option angst, but dismisses this flawed but striving businessman and his economic woes in moments.

A debut feature from writer-director Gavin Wiesen, *The Art of Getting By* is a textbook case of the ersatz indie film, presenting a moodily alternative-minded teenage loner and marshalling the forces of a hip slacker-rock soundtrack (Pavement, Clap Your Hands Say Yeah) in the service of a story that's thuddingly sentimental and formulaic. George himself reads Camus in class, listens to Leonard Cohen on repeat and, playing truant with Sally one day, takes in a screening of Louis Malle's zany Parisian farce *Zazie dans le métro* (1960), so it's impossible to imagine him getting much out of the lazy polish of the present film. Like George's art teacher, *The Art of Getting By* advocates



Drawn together: Emma Roberts, Freddie Highmore

rising to the occasion, taking risks to create art that is "honest and fearless". But, though it's attractively shot by Ben Kutchins, Wiesen's debut is slick, timid and predictable. **Sam Wigley**

CREDITS

Produced by
P.Jennifer Dana
Gia Walsh
Kara Baker
Darren Goldberg
Written by
Gavin Wiesen
Director of Photography
Ben Kutchins
Editor
Mollie Goldstein
Production Designer
Kelly McGehee
Composer
Alec Puro
Sound Mixer
Mike Guarino

Costume Designer
Erika Munro

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Production Companies
Gigi Films and Goldcrest Films present a Mint Pictures/Atlantic Pictures production in association with Island Bound Productions
Filmed with the support of The New York State Governor's Office for Motion Picture & Television Development

Executive Producers
Andrew Levitas
David Sweeney
Henry Pincus
Patrick Baker
Nick Quested
Gretchen McGowan
Jonathan Gray
Anthony Gudas

CAST

Freddie Highmore
George Zinavov
Emma Roberts
Sally Howe
Michael Angarano
Dustin
Elizabeth Reaser
Charlotte Howe
Sam Robards
Jack Sargent
Jarlath Conroy
Harris McElroy
Ann Dowd
Mrs Grimes
Marcus Carl Franklin
Will Sharpe

Sasha Spielberg
Zoe Rubinstein
Rita Wilson
Vivian Sargent
Blair Underwood
Principal Martinson
Alicia Silverstone
Ms Herman

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

7,491 ft +0 frames

As If I Am Not There

Ireland/Macedonia/
Sweden/Germany 2010
Director: Juanita Wilson
Certificate 18 110m 13s

There are two wars going on in this sombre drama based on the bestselling novel by Croatian writer Slavenka Drakulic: one is being fought over the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina, another over the territory of the female body.

The violation of the protagonist, Samira, is not complete once she has been repeatedly and viciously raped in a concentration camp. She then prostitutes herself, in a manner that highlights the complexities of control and consent, using her beauty to reduce male power over her and sacrificing her autonomy for survival, but also, implicitly, gaining pleasure. When finally Samira goes through labour, its agony is portrayed as a mirror of her earlier ordeal, and is followed by the confusion of being hormonally attached to an infant she doesn't want, one conceived in rage and hatred. A shot of her breasts leaking milk into her hospital gown emphasises her imprisonment within a body that has repeatedly decided her destiny for her.

It could be argued that the male characters in the film are also enslaved by physicality and physical abuse – their bodies claimed as cannon fodder, their desires perverted by a culture in which sex is rape – but it is Samira's experience to which we are most closely

allied. Indeed, the film's extreme focus on its protagonist is something of a limitation, especially given Samira's inscrutability. Natasha Petrovic has been justly praised for a performance that's evidently deeply felt; but since Samira rarely speaks to anyone, her personality and values are concealed to the point that her actions can seem arbitrary. Her sudden decision to put on lipstick and seduce a camp commander is one such jump: "I look like me," she argues to her fellow captives, even though the girl we met at the start of the film wore no makeup and was reserved. Arbitrary behaviour and personality change is a feature of trauma, of course, but one also feels that here the desire for dramatic impact has sometimes displaced the commitment to authenticity – and compromised the subtlety of the delivery. Some scenes feel mannered and overblown, particularly when the rather schmaltzy score gets up.

It's not as if the miseries depicted need amping up. Indeed, the ordeals we witness at the camp are so distally awful that the viewer can feel almost numbed. The fact that acts of brutality drawn from life can seem jarringly extreme when placed within the narrative of a film is a strange phenomenon – and perhaps an interesting lesson in the expectation we place on fictional characters to behave more consistently and logically than real people. When Samira is beaten up and gang-raped by swaggering, joking soldiers who then urinate on her, it's hard not to see it as ludicrously extreme wickedness – even though, like all the film's events, it's sourced from true accounts. It doesn't



War zone: Natasha Petrovic

SYNOPSIS Bosnia, the 1990s. Samira, a woman in her twenties, is in hospital, looking with ambivalence at her newborn baby boy.

In flashback we see her leaving her family home in Sarajevo to take up a teaching post in a rural village. Soon after her arrival, soldiers come to the village and round up the population. The men are shot, the women transported to a camp. At the camp Samira is repeatedly beaten and gang-raped, as are other women and young girls. Samira defiantly applies lipstick and presents herself to a commander of the camp, who falls for her and gives her special treatment. The women hear a rumour that they are going to be taken from the camp and 'exchanged'. One young girl who has been raped and mutilated dies of her injuries; her mother commits suicide. The women are put on buses and driven through bombed-out towns to open country, where the exchange takes place.

Some time later, Samira is free and back in Sarajevo. In a doctor's office, she asks for an abortion but is told it is too late. At her parents' house, heavily pregnant, she watches war reports on TV; she goes to a skating rink where she watches children play. She has the baby, and contemplates abandoning him. Finally she holds and breastfeeds him, weeping as she does so.

SYNOPSIS New York, the present. Teenager George never commits himself to anything, seeing existence as pointless. His teachers are frustrated that he won't make the most of his obvious talent and intelligence. A loner, he nevertheless strikes up a friendship with classmate Sally.

Bunking off school with Sally, George sees his stepfather in the street when he should be at work, and observes him going into a cheap café. George befriends Dustin, an artist who has come to his school to give a career talk. Dustin shows an interest in Sally. At a Valentine's Day dinner, Sally propositions George but retracts her advances when George looks uncertain.

The headmaster gives George an ultimatum: he must complete all his undone homework for the term or he won't graduate. George's art teacher tells him he must paint just one deeply felt picture in order to pass. George confronts his stepfather and discovers that his business has failed and that he has persuaded George's mother to remortgage her flat to support him. George finds out that Sally is seeing Dustin. He devotes his time to completing his assignments, and paints a portrait of Sally.

At the graduation ceremony, George is relieved to hear his name announced. Rather than go to Europe with Dustin, Sally returns to find George.

← seem possible that the captors could be real feeling people – but then prisoners and torture victims throughout history must have thought this of their abusers. Perhaps the question is whether the horror and strangeness of such acts can be adequately expressed by a film that frequently favours rather blunt button-pressing.

A debut feature from Irish director Juanita Wilson (already Oscar-nominated for her 2008 short *The Door*), *As If I Am Not There* has undeniable emotional impact. As a chronicle of conflict, it's somewhat flawed by over-emphasis; but as a story of pragmatism, self-preservation and female sacrifice, it touches some original and dangerous ground.

♥ **Hannah McGill**

CREDITS

Produced by
James Flynn
Nathalie Lichtenthaler
Karen Richards
Written by
Juanita Wilson
Based on the novel by
Slavenka Drakulic
Director of
Photography
Tim Flerning
Film Editor
Nathan Nugent
Production Designer
Bujar Mucha
Music Composed by
Kiri Dzajkowski
Sound Mixer
Tsvetani Kadyanski
Costume Designer
Zaklina Krstevska

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Sektor Film and
StellaNova Film
Production
Companies
A Wide Eye Films and
Octagon Films
production in
co-production with
Sektor Film, StellaNova
Film and Film i Väst AB
In association with
WMG Film GmbH
Supported by
Eurimages, Swedish
Film Institute and the
Macedonian Film Fund
With the participation of
Bord Scannán na
hÉireann/Irish Film
Board
Developed with the
support of the MEDIA
Programme of the
European Community,
Bord Scannán na
hÉireann/Irish Film
Board
Developed in
association with W2
Filmproduktion und
Vertriebs GmbH
Produced with the
support of investment
incentives for the Irish
Film Industry provided
by the Government of
Ireland
Executive Producer
Winfried Hammacher

CAST

Natasha Petrovic
Samira
Fedja Stukan
the captain
Jelena Jovanova
Jasmina
Sanja Buric
nurse
Irina Apelgren
Alisa
Zvezdana Angelovska
Halida

Beautiful Lies

France 2010

Director: Pierre Salvadori

Certificate 12A 104m 33s

Misaddressed letters and eavesdropping, the traditional tropes of true love's unsmooth course, are the vectors of this film's beautiful lies. Though some of the letters here are written on a MacBook by salon-owner Emilie, the arc of the narrative isn't much altered from Jane Austen's *Emma*, which is evoked by the protagonist's name: an attractive but emotionally immature woman is pursued by a wise but romantically inexperienced man; in the course of deflecting his pursuit through matchmaking, she exhibits her worst traits, only to be humbled by the man so that her remorse rekindles his attraction. It's a formula knowingly employed in films such as *Clueless* (1995) and *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001), which riff on a deep cultural investment in these character tropes and the resolution of their vicissitudes through romantic union. *Beautiful Lies* (*De vrais mensonges*) certainly follows the pattern, but its tweaks suggest a lack of understanding of the formula.

While the ending secures the happy-ever-after demanded by the genre, the film misreads the stakes of a romantic comedy. The credit sequence, tinted in vivid colours, plays out from the point of view of Jean, the handyman at Emilie's beauty parlour, as he watches her through the stained-glass panes of the salon door. We then hear his voiceover as he handwrites an anonymous, finely phrased love letter to her. All this suggests that we are meant to identify and sympathise with Jean, whereas romantic comedy as a genre (even when French) specifically solicits a female audience; the fact that the story is set in a beauty salon and focuses on Emilie's relationship with her mother intensifies that address.

Yet Jean is given control of the film's opening and, in Sami Bouajila's beautifully judged performance, becomes the only sympathetic character in the film, even when behaving badly after he realises that he's been deceived by Emilie – bad behaviour designed to provoke her into confessing her deception and realising her love for (or dependence on) him. With no further privileged insight into his motivations, Jean's continuing attraction to the manipulative Emilie is unconvincing, dependent only on a truth universally acknowledged: Audrey Tautou's attractiveness, flaunted in Capri pants and cheek-dimpling close-ups. While apprehending the Austenesque convolutions of the romantic comedy from the point of view of the male protagonist (the genre's object, not its subject) is, in the fashion of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), a fascinating premise, this film wants its projected – female – audience to gaze enraptured at Tautou and identify with her too.

Emilie's subjectivity, such as it is, emerges not through her interactions with Jean, but rather with her mother



Austen minor: Audrey Tautou

Maddy (Nathalie Baye), once her artist husband's muse and now discarded for a younger model. Emilie, in a sense, becomes a substitute for her father, flirting with her mother through anonymous billets-doux after her tactic of redirecting Jean's love letter lifts her mother out of depression. Emilie then persuades Jean to become, effectively, her substitute and live out the false promise of the correspondence. The chain of substitutions appears resolved by the 'correct' pairing of Jean and Emilie at the end of the film, but this happens through Maddy's intervention and at the father's exhibition, in an unintentionally disturbing literalisation

of the family romance.

The message is clearly and conventionally Freudian: the mother-daughter relationship is a beautiful lie of substitutability riven by sexual competition. The salon setting further implies that female beauty is only skin deep, and that women are essentially deceptive. Lavishing painterly light on the performers and locations and littering the script with quotations from C.P. Cavafy and references to modern art, the film too indulges in deception, attempting to elevate by cosmetic means what is essentially a weak, unsightful episode of *Cutting It* to the status of arthouse. ♥ **Sophie Mayer**

CREDITS

Produced by
Philippe Martin
Screenplay
Pierre Salvadori
Benoît Graffin
Dialogue
Pierre Salvadori
Director of
Photography
Gilles Henry
Film Editor
Isabelle Devinck
Art Director
Yves Fournier
Original Music
Composed,
Conducted and
Orchestrated by
Philippe Eidel
Sound
Michel Casang

Christophe Winding
Josefina Rodriguez
Joel Rangan
Costume Designer
Virginie Montel

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TF1 Films Production,
Tovo Films
Production
Companies
A Les Films Pelléas
production in
co-production with TF1
Films Production and
Tovo Films
With the participation of
Canal+, CinéCinéma
In association with
Sofica Coficup - un
fonds Backup Films,
Wild Bunch and

Cinéma 4
Developed with the
support of Soficapital
and Developimage
With the support of
Région Languedoc
Roussillon
In partnership with
Centre National du
Cinéma and l'Image
Animée

Judith Chemla
Paulette

Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Trinity Filmed
Entertainment

9,409 ft +8 frames

French theatrical title
De vrais mensonges

CAST

Audrey Tautou
Emilie Dandrieux
Nathalie Baye
Maddy Dandrieux
Sami Bouajila
Jean
Stéphanie Lagarde
Sylvia

SYNOPSIS A French seaside town, the present. Emilie has just opened a hair salon. Her mother Maddy has been depressed since Emilie's artist father left her for a younger woman – whose pregnancy Emilie is supposed to be announcing as a prelude to a divorce. When Emilie receives an anonymous love letter, she hatches a plan to readdress the letter to Maddy to soften the blow. The letter's author is Jean, the salon's handyman; when it is revealed that he is a UN translator taking time out after a breakdown, the unscholarly Emilie is overwhelmed and fires him.

The letter has the desired effect on Maddy. Emilie – still unaware that Jean is the letter's author – rehires him to romance her mother, penning a second letter herself. Jean confesses to Emilie that he wrote the initial letter to her; as a favour, he agrees to dinner at Maddy's. His confession is overheard by Maddy, who vengefully hands him a bundle of cash which she claims is from Emilie. Bitterly disappointed, Jean gets very drunk and has sex with Maddy – witnessed, unbeknown to the lovers, by Emilie.

Jean leaves for a translation job in Paris but is reunited with Emilie after Maddy writes a letter as if from her daughter, inviting Jean to her father's art opening.

A Better Life

USA 2011

Director: Chris Weitz

Certificate 12A 97m 23s

If director Chris Weitz was looking for a change after the CGI fantasy fest of *The Golden Compass* (2007) and the high-cheekboned emoting of *Twilight* follow-up *New Moon* (2009), he's certainly found it.

Set in the grittier locales of LA, *A Better Life* is the gently understated tale of middle-aged Mexican Carlos Galindo, an illegal immigrant who works as a casual labourer in the gardens of well-to-do Angelenos, scraping by beneath the radar with his teenage son Luis. Their cramped East LA quarters affording just one bed, Carlos spends his nights on the couch, too dog tired to change out of the jeans and shirt he wears throughout. As Carlos, Demián Bichir also wears pretty much the same expression all through the film, though this isn't a criticism: his performance – much of it in subtitled Spanish – is all the more affecting for being utterly unshowy. On screen almost all of the film's running time, he conveys the accepting, dogged stoicism of someone whose nose is forever pressed against the window of the American Dream but who will never be able to savour its privileges. In the US he has no papers, no rights, no recourse to law. Even so, Carlos harbours few illusions about life back home; when friend Blasco decides to return to Mexico to start a parcel-delivery business, Carlos asks him: "Deliver packages? To who? We're all here."

There are two 'better lives' here: the one Carlos originally came to the US in search of, and the one he hopes to build for his son. It's his desire to get Luis away from his police-patrolled high school and his tattooed wannabe-gangster buddies that compels Carlos to invest borrowed money in a pickup truck to start his own gardening business – a decision that sets in motion a four-wheel reworking of De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) and leads father and son on a desperate quest through LA's less salubrious corners (made

beautiful by the cinematography of Javier Aguirresarobe).

Oddly, given that Weitz elicited a terrific performance from a 12-year-old Nicholas Hoult in his 2002 film *About a Boy*, it's the father-son dynamic that seems *A Better Life*'s weak link, ultimately leading Weitz and screenwriter Eric Eason to a sentimental finale that's underpowered rather than underplayed. But the film has the feel of a heartfelt personal project; it has something to say about the plight of 'illegals' in America; and above all it has Bichir. ♦♦ **Jane Lamacraft**

CREDITS

Produced by
Paul Junger Witt
Christian McLaughlin
Chris Weitz
Janni Gertz
Stacey Lubliner
Screenplay
Eric Eason
Story
Roger L. Simon
Director of Photography
Javier Aguirresarobe
Editor
Peter Lambert
Production Designer
Missy Stewart
Music
Alexandre Desplat
Sound Mixer
Yehuda Maayan
Costume Designer
Elaine Montalvo

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Production Companies
Summit Entertainment presents in association with Lime Orchard Productions a Witt-Thomas/Depth of Field production
In association with McLaughlin Films
A Chris Weitz film
Executive Producer
Tony Thomas

CAST

Demián Bichir
Carlos Galindo
José Julián
Luis Galindo
Delores Heredia
Anita
Joaquín Cosío
Blasco Martínez
Nancy Lenahan
Mrs Donnelley

Tim Griffin
juvie officer
Eddie 'Polin' Sotelo
himself
Gabriel Chavarria
Ramon
Bobby Soto
Facundo
Chelsea Rendon
Ruthie Valdez
Carlos Linares
Santiago

In Colour
[L85:1]

Distributor
E! Films

8,763 ft +8 frames

Cars 2

USA 2011

Director: John Lasseter

Certificate U 112m 8s

Only in animation could the premise of the nursery-rhyme book *Tootles the Taxi* – in which cars and other vehicles are anthropomorphised with eyes and mouths – become a summer blockbuster, mixing James Bond parody and globetrotting travelogue. Such a film is *Cars 2*, Pixar's 12th and least feature to date. It's frequently funny and visually pleasurable – lovers of a certain kind of fanciful detail may be enthralled – but it's also inferior to any of the other big computer cartoons released in the past few months (*Tangled*, *Rango*, *Rio*, *Kung Fu Panda 2*). It wouldn't be news if any other CGI studio had released a substandard product, but Pixar is different. Until now, the biggest dent in Pixar's reputation was the first *Cars* (2006), which lost some reviewers with its whimsical premise – not only can the cars speak, but they exist in a carified world without a single human being; in effect, the cars are humans.

Other critics objected to the first film's sentimentalised sub-Capra paeon to a (literally) bypassed small town, as brash racing car Lightning McQueen is waylaid in the desert backwater of Radiator Springs. *Cars 2* goes to the opposite extreme. It's paced – very overtly – like a Bond action film, using Radiator Springs as a brief pit-stop in Pixar's most sweeping fantasy world. Even the epic *Wall-E* (2008) was mostly confined to two settings (an empty city, a spaceship) but *Cars 2* roars around Tokyo, Paris and a Monaco-style coastal city, ending with an extended dash

across London. It could be argued that *Cars 2* is justified merely by its scenery, which is immensely enjoyable to zoom through and over. Settings such as the Les Halles market in Paris and London's Mall are cheerfully reshaped, with buildings, windows and archways redrawn to suggest grilles, bumpers and headlights.

The first time through this real-cartoon world, the viewer mainly registers the ostentatious details: London trees swaying as a flying car zooms above, or the huge murals of the casino where the villains gather. However, there are enough scene-setting details to last many repeat views. *Cars 2* will pass easily as a family DVD prospect in a few months' time.

The terrific opening sequence introduces Michael Caine as an Aston Martin James Bond – Pixar makes us believe that a car can scale an ocean rig, swing on wires and perform a controlled rooftop dive. Much of what follows is sloppy in comparison, with talky early scenes that feel triply artless performed by cars, and quotidian buddy business that requires the leads to fall out, get separated, then kiss and make up at the end.

The main character is not Lightning but Mater, a tow-truck rube voiced by comedian Daniel Lawrence Whitney, known as Larry the Cable Guy. In the film's plot, the innocent abroad is mistaken for a spy, and is mortified when he's praised for his 'cover' as an imbecile. The ending, of course, has Mater prove that he's smarter than everyone else. A more interesting film, of the kind we're used to from Pixar, might have had Mater's spy allies growing increasingly fond of him, only to realise that he really is simple, and having to question their own attitudes as a result. ♦♦ **Andrew Osmond**



Drive another day: 'Cars 2'

SYNOPSIS Los Angeles, present day. Carlos Galindo is an illegal immigrant from Mexico. He lives with his teenage son Luis and scrapes by working as a gardener. Luis is falling in with the wrong crowd and Carlos desperately wants to move him to a better school.

Deciding to return to Mexico, Carlos's regular employer Blasco tries to persuade Carlos to buy his truck and tools. Since he has no US driver's licence or papers, Carlos is reluctant to do so. He tries to find other work, waiting with a group of immigrants for casual employers to drive by and offer a day's labour. By the end of the day, only he and another man, Santiago, remain. Santiago shares his food with Carlos.

Carlos's sister Anita lends him the money to buy Blasco's truck, keeping the loan secret from her American husband. Carlos proudly begins his own gardening business and takes Santiago on as his assistant. However, while Carlos is trimming the top of a tree, Santiago steals the truck. Desperate, Carlos and Luis track Santiago down, eventually finding him at the club where he works nights. Discovering that Santiago has already sold the truck and wired the proceeds back home, Luis beats him up. Father and son trace the car to an illegal car pound and steal it back. They drive away elated, but Carlos is stopped for a routine police check. Unable to produce a licence, he is sent to a deportation centre. Before being sent back to Mexico, Carlos makes Luis promise to live with Anita and make something of himself. Luis in turn asks his father to promise to return 'home'.

Mexico, four months later. Carlos begins the trek back across the border.

CREDITS

Co-directed by

Brad Lewis

Produced by

Denise Ream

Screenplay

Ben Queen

Original Story

John Lasseter

Brad Lewis

Dan Fogelman

Directors of Photography

Lighting:

Sharon Calahan

Camera:

Jeremy Lasky

Film Editor

Stephen Schaffer

Production Designer

Harley Jessup

Original Score

Composed by

Michael Giacchino

Sound Designer

Tom Myers

Supervising Animators

Shawn Krause

Dave Mullins

©Disney Enterprises, Inc./Pixar

Production Companies

Walt Disney Pictures

presents a Pixar

Animation Studios film

Created and produced

at Pixar Animation

Studios

VOICE CAST

Larry the Cable Guy

Mater

Owen Wilson

Lightning McQueen

Michael Caine

Finn McMissile

Emily Mortimer

Holley Shiftwell

Eddie Izzard

Miles Axelrod

John Turturro

Francesco Bernoulli

Brent Musberger

Brent Mustangburger

Joe Mantegna

Grem

Thomas Kretschmann

Professor Z

Peter Jacobson

Acer

Bonnie Hunt

Sally

Darrell Waltrip

Darrell Cartrip

Franco Nero

Uncle Topolino

Vanessa Redgrave

the queen/Mama

Topolino

Dolby Digital/DTS/

SDDS

US prints by

DeLuxe

International prints by

Technicolor

[2.35:1]

[1.44:1] - Imax version

3D

Distributor

Buena Vista

International (UK)

10,092 ft +0 frames

Running time includes

short *Toy Story Toon*

Hawaiian Vacation,

approx 6 mins.



Bollywood: Kunaal Roy Kapur, Imran Khan, Vir Das

Delhi Belly

India 2011

Director: Abhinav Deo

Certificate 15 102m 29s

The matey caper genre as defined by early Guy Ritchie is familiar in Bollywood, notably in such recent films as *99*, *Sankat City* and the unofficial *Lock, Stock* remake *Phir Hera Pheri*. *Delhi Belly* falls squarely within the genre but adds to it by incorporating Farrelly-esque toilet humour and Apatovian deadpan crudity.

The central plot hook – a packet of smuggled diamonds is swapped for a stool sample, mayhem ensues – may not seem extreme to western audiences but for India it's a huge push of the envelope. In a cinematic landscape most often characterised by coyness and an adherence to family values, *Delhi Belly* represents a section of modern India – brash, urban, aggressive, moneyed – that's nowadays unafraid to speak its mind. The central characters – journalist Tashi, photographer Nitin

and commercial artist Arup – may live in a squalid flat with a filthy toilet, but they belong to the ranks of the effortlessly cool who are Delhi's urban elite. They speak, as real Delhiites of their stratum do, in English peppered with invective and a smattering of Hindi.

Akshat Verma's cleverly constructed script thus roots the film in contemporary Delhi but uses it as a springboard for an uproarious farce that is quite simply the funniest film to come out of India in years. The twists and turns are many but they are never telegraphed. Though the climactic shootout in a hotel room is disturbingly similar to the end reels of Tony Scott's *True Romance* (1993), Verma and director Abhinav Deo can be credited with creating a refreshingly different product.

The stool sample in this case belongs to Nitin, who contracts the titular gastric ailment after consuming a chicken drumstick dipped in spices by a hand, as we see in close-up, that's just scratched a groin long and lovingly at a brothel. When the switch happens, all of Delhi's gangsters are on the flatmates'

trail, sending the trio on one long chase across the city, fuelled by composer Ram Sampath's rock anthem 'Bhaag DK Bose' (which is deliciously rude when heard in loop in Hindi). Verma's script keeps the rudeness quotient high. Apart from the expletives – the most in a mainstream Indian film to date – there's fart and potty humour and even (decorously covered) shots of an erection and cannulings.

A film like *Delhi Belly* wouldn't have been made in India without the backing of star producer Aamir Khan, who has an unerring knack for picking unusual subjects that strike box-office gold. With no one else willing to take the risk, he backed the four-hour cricket epic *Lagaan* (2001), which went on to receive an Oscar nomination, the dyslexia-themed *Like Stars on Earth* (2007), and suicide satire *Peepli Live* (2010). *Delhi Belly*, which has opened to full houses across the world, seems destined to replicate the success of those films and, more importantly, empower Indian cinema to tell new stories without the cautious self-censorship that has dogged it through the years.

♦♦ Naman Ramachandran

SYNOPSIS New Delhi, the present. Journalist Tashi, photographer Nitin and commercial artist Arup share a crumbling one-room apartment. Tashi's fiancée Sonia, a flight attendant, accepts a packet on one of her flights and agrees to deliver it to a Delhi address, unaware that it contains smuggled diamonds. She gives the packet to Tashi to deliver but he's busy, so he passes it on to Nitin. However, Nitin is suffering from food poisoning, having eaten a dodgy chicken drumstick at the brothel where he takes compromising pictures for his sideline in blackmail. Nitin asks Arup to deliver the packet, and also asks him to deliver his stool sample to a clinic for analysis. Arup muddles up the packets: the Delhi mafia get the stool sample; the diamonds are delivered to the clinic.

The gangsters go to the flat and torture Tashi and Arup in an attempt to discover the whereabouts of the diamonds. Nitin arrives home, having had the unopened packet returned to him by the clinic. The ceiling collapses and Tashi, Nitin and Arup escape in the confusion. They sell the diamonds to a jeweller. Tashi receives a call informing him that the gangsters have kidnapped Sonia and will release her only if the diamonds are returned. The friends try to buy back the diamonds, but the jeweller demands double the money. With Tashi's work colleague Menaka (who has a crush on him), they disguise themselves in burqas and steal back the diamonds, returning the jeweller's money.

The friends' landlord Manish is blackmailed by Nitin with some compromising pictures into calling on his brother, a senior policeman, for help. Tashi, Menaka, Arup, Nitin, Manish and the police all converge on the hotel where Sonia is being held. In the ensuing shootout the gangsters are killed. The diamonds come into the possession of Manish who, unaware of what they are, puts them in a showcase at home. The flatmates are rich because Nitin swapped the jeweller's money for bricks. Sonia finds out that Tashi and Menaka kissed in the past. She dumps Tashi, who pairs up with Menaka.

CREDITS

Produced by

Aamir Khan

Kiran Rao

Ronnie Screwvala

Producer

Jim Furgele

Written by

Akshat Verma

Cinematographer

Jason West

Editor

Huzefa Lokhandwala

Production Designer

Shashank Tere

Music

Ram Sampath

Lyricists

Amitabh Bhattacharya

Akshat Verma

Munna Dhiman

Ram Sampath

Chetan Shashital

Sound Designers

Vinod Subramanian

Dwarak Warner

Costume Designer

Niharika Khan

Production Companies

UTV Motion Pictures

presents in association

with Ferocious Attack

Cow

Aamir Khan

Productions'

Executive Producer

B. Shrinivas Rao

CAST

Imran Khan

Tashi

Vir Das

Arup

Kunaal Roy Kapur

Nitin

Poorna Jagannathan

Menaka

Shenaz Treasurywala

Sonia

Vijay Raaz

Somayajulu

Pareesh Ganatra

Manish Chand Jain

Kim Bodnia

Raju Kher

Rahul Singh

Rahul Pendkalkar

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

UTV Motion Pictures

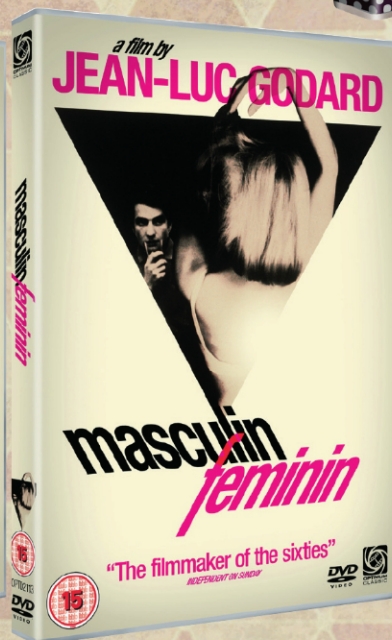
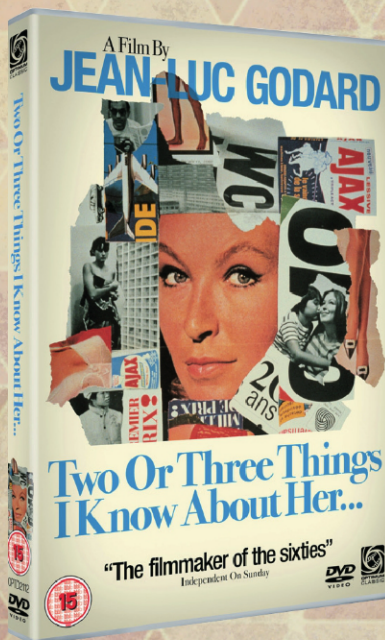
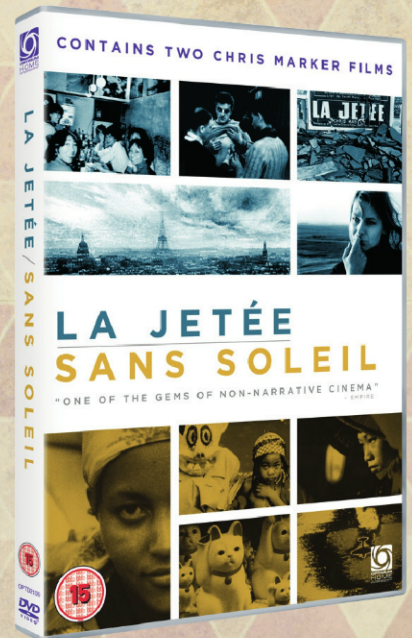
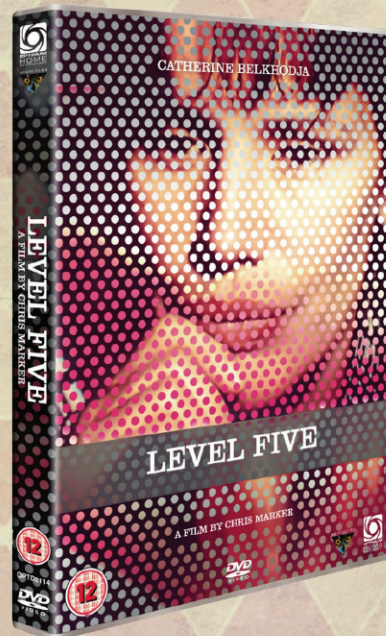
9,222 ft +13 frames

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I'm still stand-in: Dominic Cooper, Ludivine Sagnier

The Devil's Double

Belgium/The Netherlands/
Malta/USA 2011

Director: Lee Tamahori

Power and corruption, sex and violence – they just seem to go together, and moviemakers are often seduced by the combination since it allows them to justify sundry amounts of onscreen sensationalism while feigning moralistic disapproval of said excesses. That's certainly the case in this adaptation of the memoir by Uday Hussein's real-life double Latif Yahia (who was involved in the film's development process), which promises the viewer an authentic glimpse inside the depraved world of Saddam Hussein's wayward son but doesn't have that much to say about the whole awful circus apart from a very obvious tsk tsk.

When we first meet Uday, we share protagonist Latif's sense of foreboding, soon revealed to be entirely justified as the former's monstrous behaviour becomes clear – yet that moral assessment remains unyieldingly constant through the entire film, essentially telling us what we knew five minutes in. Uday Hussein is an unredeemed psychotic, so no surprises there, and given that his double obviously lives to tell the tale and get the book deal, there are limited options on the outcome too. Screenwriter Michael Thomas, who wrestled historical events into a semblance of cinematic shape in the Profumo saga *Scandal* (1988), struggles here to do more than mount a holding operation, playing for time so that we can soak up the garish local colour, before eventually finding a pretext for a final-reel lurch that brings matters to a not unpredictable conclusion.

One keeps waiting for the upstanding Latif to stray to the dark side but it never quite happens, even if love-interest Sarrah (an ill-at-ease Ludivine Sagnier) – also held under duress in Uday's malign

orbit – hints that some of the latter's brutishness has rubbed off on him. The result is a film sorely lacking in thematic texture or even much in the way of narrative grip; it retains a certain fascination purely because of its subject-matter, but leaves us picking over the intermittent detail for want of anything better to distract us.

Dominic Cooper's tremendous work as both Latif and Uday outshines everything else here: he's broody and resilient as the morally unswerving Latif, but has more to work with in delineating Uday as a petulant child gorging himself on all sorts of adult pleasures ("I love cunt and I want to fuck it"), his reedy voice piping through buck teeth in a manner that would be

laughable were we not looking at a fiend capable of disembowelling even one of his father's henchmen in public. Cooper is so chillingly effective in the twin roles, presented with old-fashioned stagecraft rather than new-fangled digital trickery, that it's doubly disappointing Lee Tamahori's film is so superficial in its approach, never daring to hint that Uday's behaviour might reflect the untrammelled excesses of male testosterone when given ultimate licence and plenty of financial headroom. Television news clips fill out the background history, but don't expect any sort of revisionism. This is pantomime with electrodes, nude disco dancing and a very hissable baddie.

♥ Trevor Johnston

CREDITS

Producers
Paul Breuls
Michael John Fedun
Emjay Rechsteiner
Catherine Vandeleene
Written by
Michael Thomas
Based on the life story of
Latif Yahia
Cinematography
Sam McCurdy
Editor
Luis Carballar
Production Designer
Paul Kirby
Composer
Christian Henson
Sound Designer
Stefan Henrich

Costume Designer
Anna B. Sheppard

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Production Companies
Lionsgate and Herrick
Entertainment present a
Corsan presentation
A Corsan, Corino,
Staccato production in
association with FIP
Malta Ltd., Film Finance
VI, Tulchin
Entertainment and
Foreign Media
Produced with the
support of the financial
incentives provided by
the Government of
Malta

With the support of the
Netherlands Film Fund
Executive Producers
Harris Tulchin
Arjen Terpstra

CAST

Dominic Cooper
Latif Yahia/Uday
Hussein
Ludivine Sagnier
Sarrah
Raad Rawi
Mumem
Phillip Quast
Saddam Hussein/
Faoaz
Mimoun Oaissa
Ali
Khalid Laith

Yassem Al-Helou
Dar Salim
Azzam Al-Tikriti
Nasser Memarzia
Latif's father
Mem Ferda
Kamel Hannah
Pano Masti
Said Kammuneh
Akin Gazi
Saad Abd Al-Razzeq

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Icon Film Distribution

SYNOPSIS Baghdad, 1987. As the Iran-Iraq war continues, army lieutenant Latif Yahia is ordered to become a body-double for Saddam Hussein's son Uday, a notorious party animal with a deadly temper. Threats to his family guarantee Latif's acquiescence, and he undergoes plastic surgery to ensure a closer resemblance. Latif is sickened by Uday's sexual pursuit of schoolgirls, taste for prostitutes and unhindered use of torture on his enemies. Latif's rapport with Sarrah, one of Uday's many women, develops into a sexual liaison which puts them both in danger. Latif becomes an expert impersonator, standing in for Uday on a troop inspection as Saddam invades Kuwait. When the Iraqis retreat from the US counterattack, Latif hopes the regime will crumble, but Uday refuses to let him go; Latif attempts suicide by slashing his wrists. He spends time recuperating with his family; his father tells Latif to save himself instead of thinking about them. Latif makes a break for the border with Sarrah, knowing that Uday will kill his family. He finds refuge in Malta. An assassination attempt by Iraqi agents indicates that Sarrah is still in contact with Uday, so Latif returns to Iraq in secret and shoots Uday in the groin in the midst of a busy market.

We learn that Latif subsequently escaped from Iraq, and that Uday was shot dead by US forces in 2003.

Fright Night

Director: Craig Gillespie

The wave of horror remakes surges into the mid-1980s with this lightweight make-over of Tom Holland's debut feature. An anonymous product picture, the new *Fright Night* nevertheless develops the concerns of director Craig Gillespie's previous films *Lars and the Real Girl* (an outsider teen forms a relationship with a sex doll) and *Mr. Woodcock* (a young man's mother marries the high-school coach who bullied him). Holland's storyline is faithfully followed by writer Marti Noxon, whose teen horror credentials were established on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. However, the subtext – concerning the sexual ambiguity of boy-who-cried-vampire Charley, distracted from his hot (but frustrated) girlfriend by the handsome mystery man who moves in next door – is replaced here by Charley's abandonment of his dweeb past when his acne clears up and he gets a hot (but nice) girlfriend.

In Holland's original *Fright Night*, Charley's mum is intrigued by new next-door neighbour Jerry Dandrige (Chris Sarandon, an unbilled cameo victim in the remake) but notes that he lives with a male minion (a character Noxon drops) and concludes that he's probably gay. In Gillespie's version, Jane Brewster (Toni Collette) unaccountably isn't attracted to Jerry – even though he looks like Colin Farrell and has supernatural plumbing skills – because she thinks he's 'a player'. A key scene, in which Charley's girlfriend Amy tries to have sex with him for the first time only to be kicked out of bed because he's more concerned with the seducer next door, is restaged, but this time it's about Charley reverting to his pre-cool geekdom rather than doubts about his sexual orientation. And changing Peter Vincent (once Roddy McDowall, now David Tennant) from a washed-up horror-movie star into a successful but tipsy Vegas magician with a rote past trauma and a handy collection of vampire-slaying apparatus seems more like a plot convenience than an update, and Tennant's combination of Derren Brown and Russell Brand mainly prompts speculation as to why neither of them was hired.

The film compounds its second-hand status by tipping in bits from other movies: the basement lair from *Disturbia* (itself influenced by the original *Fright Night*), the rationale for a vampire choosing to live in Vegas (it's normal for night-workers to sleep all day) from *The Night Stalker*, and a gag about the inefficacy of silver bullets against vampires ("That's werewolves") from *Love at First Bite*. The 3D is a mixed blessing: in an almost refreshing change, old-school gimmicks are thrust at the screen (clawed hands, blood spurts, arrows), and there's imaginative use of the ashes left after vampire combustion. But the process makes for a drab, unflamboyant film when the concept of a vampire in Vegas should have allowed for something with more neon and sparkle. The new *Fright Night*



Vegas nightlife: Colin Farrell

is, like a lot of remakes, lively and distracting enough to pass the time, but somehow manages not to be terribly frightening, funny or sexy.

♦♦ Kim Newman

Credits for this film were unavailable at the time of going to press and will be published in the October issue.

SYNOPSIS Las Vegas, the present. Teenager Charley Brewster has dissociated himself from socially awkward friends Ed and Adam, and has started dating the attractive Amy.

Jane, Charley's single mother, is curious about new next-door neighbour Jerry. Ed tells Charley that Adam has disappeared and that Jerry is a vampire. Charley is sceptical but, after Ed is bitten and neighbour Doris abducted, he begins to suspect that Ed is right. Charley breaks into Jerry's house and rescues Doris, who combusts in daylight. He consults stage magician Peter Vincent, who owns a collection of monster-fighting artefacts, but Vincent brushes him off. Jerry realises that Charley is on to him and, in an attempt to overcome his inability to enter a home uninvited, burns down the Brewster house. Charley, his mother and Amy escape, but Mrs Brewster is hospitalised.

Charley returns to Vincent, who admits that Jerry killed his parents. Ed, now a vampire, enters Vincent's home posing as a deliveryman and is destroyed in a fight with his former friend. Jerry snatches Amy and turns her into a vampire. Charley and Vincent breach Jerry's basement lair. Charley gets close to Jerry by setting himself on fire, and stakes him with a magical artefact which restores Amy to humanity.

Got to Run

United Kingdom 2010
Director: Robbie Moffat
Certificate 12A 109m 23s

Scottish writer-director Robbie Moffat is nothing if not prolific in his output, having chalked up some 18 independent features in the past decade. However, his latest, *Got to Run*, is one of the most critically disparaged films to reach cinemas in 2011.

Presumably it was intended as a modern-day fairytale-cum-road movie, in which Cinderella-esque heroine Sarah flees domestic and professional drudgery and is rewarded in her quest for a more fulfilling life by a chance encounter with a Prince Charming figure. But although it unfolds against a recognisably contemporary British backdrop of Travelodges, motorway service stations and recession-hit high streets, as travelling sales rep Sarah crosses the country flogging lingerie, this monotonously paced story is devoid of any dramatic or psychological credibility.

Every single supporting character is a cartoonish stereotype: the chauvinistic, laddish boyfriend, the lecherous northern boss, a shop manager called Madame Colette who speaks English in a 'funny' French accent, the none-too-bright Irish businessman. Suzanne Kendall woodenly delivers Sarah's dialogue, not helped by the irritating preponderance of straight-to-camera monologues and the poor sound quality. What's more Moffat has a penchant for photographing her in her underwear – in one particularly wretched scene Sarah enthusiastically strips down in front of a male buyer to her bra and panties in order to clinch a deal, a 'censored' caption covering her breasts in a touch that's reminiscent of a flaccid 1970s sex comedy.

Throughout, the director displays a poverty of visual imagination. The various cities on Sarah's work tour are introduced via a series of clichéd establishing shots, and the film's second half becomes a clumsily composed travelogue of Scottish landscapes and monuments. Despite running being integral to Sarah's identity, we never experience how it makes her *feel*, for she never appears to tire, sweat or adjust her metronomic style.

SYNOPSIS Slough, the present. Twentysomething Sarah McGuire, a keen runner, is stuck in an unhappy relationship with her car-mechanic boyfriend Colin, and dissatisfied with her job as a travelling sales representative specialising in women's underwear. Her boss Jack Pratt dispatches her on a five-night trip around the country, selling the latest lingerie lines to shops and businesses. With Jack pressurising her to meet exacting sales targets, Sarah seeks relief in her daily running sessions.

At a pub on the way to Liverpool, Scottish barman Jimmy presents Sarah with a list of ten beautiful locations; if she runs in these places, he tells her, it will transform her life. During a stop in Blackpool, a mystic predicts that Sarah will soon meet a dark handsome stranger.

Sarah begins to visit the places recommended by Jimmy, including the Angel of the North, Castlerigg Stone Circle, Hadrian's Wall and Lindisfarne. In Edinburgh she discovers that Jack is employing other young female sales agents; she quits the job and continues on to the mountains of Ben Lomond and Glencoe and then to the Skye Bridge. Her car breaks down outside Inverpolly in the Highlands, where she meets sympathetic mechanic Duncan, who's also the local laird. They fall in love, and Sarah promises to hang up her running shoes.



Chariots of dire: Suzanne Kendall

Those hoping that the self-improving Sarah's dreams of reinvention might be resolved in any sort of progressive manner will be disappointed by *Got to Run*'s risible beach-side finale. Having delivered a speech about her fears of being trapped like her (unseen) friends by the responsibilities of mortgages and young children and caring for ageing parents, she resolves all her romantic and financial problems simply by running into the arms of a mechanic, who conveniently doubles up as the local laird.

♦♦ Tom Dawson

CREDITS

Producer
Robbie Moffat
Writer
Robbie Moffat
Camera
Bob Ramsay
Editor
Simon Harris
Music
Pascal Isnard
Sound
Ray Stachacz
Costume
June Hudson

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Production Companies
Moffat Sutherland Pictures presents a Laird production
Laird in association with Moffat Sutherland Pictures
Executive Producer
Mari Sutherland

CAST

Suzanne Kendall
Sarah McGuire

Jon Paul Gates
Jack Pratt
Howard Corlett
Colin
Jack Collins
Duncan
Bruce Lawrence
Jimmy
Joe Rainbow
Kevin
June Hudson
Madam Lee
Laura Cleary
Colette
Louise Hawthorne
Linda Pratt

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Palm Tree Productions

9,844 ft +8 frames

The Guard

Ireland/United Kingdom/USA/Germany 2011
Director: John Michael McDonagh
Certificate 15 96m 0s

Not since Will Hay played the forgetful Sergeant Duddfoot in British comedy *Ask a Policeman* (1939) has there been an officer quite as eccentric as Brendan Gleeson's Gerry Boyle in *The Guard*. Venal, overweight, keen on his bacon and sausages and on hiring prostitutes, Boyle is a very long way removed from the typical cop hero in a police procedural. Gleeson underplays him quite wonderfully – whatever Boyle does, whether filching drugs from a road-crash victim or making egregiously racist remarks to Don Cheadle's FBI officer, he never loses his air of boyish innocence. We root for him in spite of his behaviour.

This may be a comedy but writer-director John Michael McDonagh deliberately gives *The Guard* many of the aspects of a conventional hardboiled thriller. We see shootings, corpses, policemen roughing up suspects (or at least cuffing them on the back of the head), and the finale is full of flying bullets and exploding bombs. There are also plentiful references to spaghetti westerns and a tongue-in-cheek portrayal of Gleeson as a lardy Irish equivalent to Django or the Man with No Name.

Just occasionally, McDonagh's screenplay is a little too arch and self-conscious. Rather than portray its three drug-dealing villains as conventional hardmen, he gives them many of the same traits as Boyle – and the film risks drifting into whimsy as a result. One of the crooks (Liam Cunningham) is as erudite as any philosophy academic and parades his learning at the most incongruous moments. Mark Strong's token Englishman evinces world-weariness and disillusionment. "I am sick and tired of the kind of people we have to deal with in this business," he grumbles. "What do you expect?" his henchman replies, "We are drug dealers." The relationship between Boyle and Cheadle skirts close to buddy-movie cliché. In one scene, we see the FBI man staring horrified as his Garda colleague wolfs down yet another plate of fried food. In another, he's shown forlornly wandering down a lane in the Irish countryside, a fish utterly out of water in his mac and sharp suit; the natives in the west of Ireland treat him as if he's from Mars.

At its best, *The Guard* has a wit and perceptiveness that recalls the comedies of Bill Forsyth (notably *Local Hero*, which likewise played on culture clash). Some of the jokes are a little obvious and the quality of the writing isn't consistent, with brilliantly conceived set pieces interspersed with moments that belong in a half-baked sitcom. Even so, the film's trump card is its likeability. It's heartening, too, to see Gleeson – so often consigned to character parts – in his best starring role since John Boorman's *The General* (1998).

♦♦ Geoffrey Macnab

CREDITS

Produced by
Chris Clark
Flora Fernandez-
Marengo
Ed Guiney
Andrew Lowe
Written by
John Michael
McDonagh
Director of
Photography
Larry Smith
Edited by
Chris Gill
Production Designer
John Paul Kelly
Music
Calixto
Sound Designer
Niall Brady
Costume Designer
Eimer Ní
Mhaoldomhnaigh

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Productions Limited
and UK Film Council
Production
Companies
Presented by Reprisal
Films & Element
Pictures in association
with Prescience, Aegis
Film Fund, UK Film
Council, Crescendo
Productions, Eos
Pictures LLP and with
the participation of Bord
Scannán na
hÉireann/the Irish Film
Board
Produced in association
with RTE
Produced with the
support of investment
incentives for the Irish
Film Industry provided
by the Government of
Ireland
Filmed with the
assistance of Bord
Scannán na
hÉireann/the Irish Film

Board Regional Support
Fund
Made with the support
of MEDIA Program of
the European
Community and The
National Lottery
through UK Film Council
Premiere Fund
Executive Producers
Martin McDonagh
Don Cheadle
Lenore Zeman
Ralph Kamp
Tim Smith
Paul Brett
David Nash
Film Extracts
The Shout (1978)

CAST

Brendan Gleeson
Gerry Boyle
Don Cheadle
Wendell Everett
Mark Strong
Clive Cornell
Liam Cunningham
Francis Sheehy-
Skeffington
Fionnula Flanagan
Eileen Boyle
David Wilmut
Liam O'Leary
Katarina Cas
Gabriella McBride
Rory Keenan
Aidan McBride
Sarah Greene
Sinead Mulligan
Dominic McElligott
Aoife O'Carroll
Pat Shortt
Colum Hennessey

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Optimum Releasing

8,640 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS A small country town in the west of Ireland, the present. Gerry Boyle, a profane and eccentric police sergeant, is assigned a new partner, Aidan McBride. The two visit a crime scene and examine the body of a young man. McBride is shot dead after he stops a car carrying three drug runners. FBI agent Wendell Everett is drafted in to help unravel what looks to be a major drug-smuggling racket. As a black American, Everett is initially startled by Boyle's casual racism and offbeat approach to police work. Tipped off about Everett's plans, the drug runners devise an elaborate ruse to send his investigations off track. Boyle, who has procured guns from an IRA man, is more successful in his investigations. When Boyle refuses to be bribed, Liam O'Leary, the most psychopathic of the three drug runners, breaks into his cottage intending to kill him. Boyle shoots him. Boyle discovers that the drug runners are planning to move their cargo by boat, and alerts Everett. A ferocious gun battle ensues. With Everett providing covering fire, Boyle swims to the boat and comes face to face with Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, the leader of the drug gang. Sheehy-Skeffington is killed. There is an explosion and it seems certain that Boyle has died. However, as Everett and a boy standing by the pier note, the sergeant always claimed to be a champion swimmer.

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2

USA/United Kingdom 2011

Director: David Yates

Certificate 12A 130m 16s

A young man with special powers prepares to sacrifice his life in order to save his people... The biblical parallels have never been clearer than in this last adaptation of J.K. Rowling's novels, in which teen wizard Harry Potter discovers that he must give his own life in order to fulfil his destiny and destroy the evil Lord Voldemort. Like Christ, he struggles with the challenge. And as Harry is forced to confront his own mortality and the responsibility on his shoulders, this final film develops an emotional depth arguably absent from previous entries in the series. In one poignant scene, Harry is visited by the spirits of his loved ones and reassured that he must not fear death.

It's a weighty theme for a family series and one that's dealt with sensitively, though how much this will comfort children faced with the demise of many of their beloved characters remains to be seen. Even surviving familiar faces are only shown briefly, with most of the time given over to Harry's personal quest and the climactic battle between Voldemort's Death Eaters and the good wizards at Hogwarts School. The bastion of Hogwarts is literally ruined as the black-clad baddies descend with an army of nasty creatures, plucking off sensible school kids one by one. There's plenty to decode in the wardrobe choices alone, as cardigan-clad Neville Longbottom stands defiantly before the brutal 'Snatcher' Scabior, who resembles Adam Ant leading an army of Goths. Earlier, Ron describes Hermione as "hideous" when she's disguised in the fetishistic garb of Voldemort's supporter Bellatrix Lestrange. Wholesome wins, kids.

Of course, the true stars of the battle are the first-class visual effects, enhanced by the 3D depth of field which invites immersion in the dramatic crumbling of Hogwarts. The weakest link, as ever, is the disparity between the older and younger performers. While the central trio have improved over the years, they still struggle to imbue their all too brief lines of dialogue with the kind of depth brought by the likes of Maggie Smith and Alan Rickman. One could argue that this is inevitable, but it's an unwelcome distraction nevertheless. It's Rickman's character Professor Snape who gives the film both a much needed twist and a beating heart: flashbacks to his youth ponder on longing, loss, bitterness and self-sacrifice. For all Harry's grand dilemmas, it's Snape's smaller, personal story that could see adults shedding a tear for the first time in the Potter saga. It's a shame the younger characters' romances aren't afforded the same time and treatment.



A farewell to charms: Daniel Radcliffe

While director David Yates's previous instalments have equalled it in many ways (sets, visuals, performances, humour...), this last film brings an emphasis on both action and heart. And by its very nature it's a more satisfying cinematic experience than its open-ended predecessors. *Deathly Hallows Part 2* brings the closure that Potter fans have been simultaneously seeking and dreading – something they and Harry have in common.

Anna Smith

CREDITS

Produced by
David Heyman
David Barron
J.K. Rowling
Screenplay
Steve Kloves
Based on the novel by
J.K. Rowling
Director of
Photography
Eduardo Serra
Edited by
Mark Day
Production Designer
Stuart Craig
Music Composed and
Conducted by
Alexandre Desplat

Sound Designer
Michael Fentum
Costume Designer
Jany Temime
Stunt Co-ordinator
Greg Powell
Visual Effects
Double Negative
The Moving Picture
Company
Cinesite
Framestore
Baseblack
Rising Sun Pictures
Tippett Studio
Lola Visual Effects
Gradient Effects
Union Visual Effects
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Entertainment Inc.
Production
Companies
Warner Bros. Pictures
presents a Heyday Films
production
A David Yates film
Executive Producer
Lionel Wigram

CAST

Daniel Radcliffe
Harry Potter
Rupert Grint
Ron Weasley
Emma Watson
Hermione Granger
Helena Bonham Carter
Bellatrix Lestrange
Robbie Coltrane
Rubeus Hagrid
Warwick Davis
Griphook/Professor
Filius Flitwick
Ralph Fiennes
Lord Voldemort
Michael Gambon
Professor Albus
Dumbledore
John Hurt
Ollivander
Jason Isaacs
Lucius Malfoy
Gary Oldman
Sirius Black
Alan Rickman
Professor Severus
Snape
Maggie Smith
Professor Minerva
McGonagall
David Thewlis
Remus Lupin
Julie Walters
Molly Weasley
Matthew Lewis
Neville Longbottom
Bonnie Wright
Ginny Weasley

Dolby Digital/DTS/
SDSS
Colour by
Technicolor
[2.35:1]
3D

Distributor
Warner Bros
Distributors (UK)

11,724 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS Harry Potter's enemy Lord Voldemort now possesses the powerful Elder Wand, one of the Deathly Hallows which give mastery over death. In order to destroy Voldemort, Harry must find and destroy the Horcruxes containing parts of Voldemort's soul.

The goblin Griphook tells Harry that there may be a Horcrux in the vault of Voldemort's supporter Bellatrix Lestrange. With his friends Ron and Hermione, Harry enters the vault in disguise; they take the Horcrux and escape. Harry telepathically knows that Voldemort is aware of this, and that another Horcrux is at Hogwarts School. He returns to the school to find that Professor Snape – apparently one of Voldemort's supporters – is now headmaster. Harry confronts Snape, who retreats after a wand duel with Professor McGonagall. McGonagall summons a force field to protect Hogwarts. Harry finds the Horcrux. His friend Neville Longbottom protects the bridge to Hogwarts from an army of Death Eaters, luring them to their deaths. However, Death Eaters and other creatures descend on Hogwarts for a bloody battle.

Meanwhile Harry, Ron and Hermione spy on Snape and Voldemort in the Hogwarts boathouse. Voldemort kills Snape; as he dies, Snape sheds a tear which Harry captures and uses to see Snape's memories in the Pensieve. Flashbacks reveal that Snape was in love with Harry's mother, and that Voldemort inadvertently turned Harry into a Horcrux when he killed her. It also becomes clear that Snape was secretly working against Voldemort. Harry realises that he must die if Voldemort is to be defeated. Harry and Voldemort fight; Harry appears to die. Voldemort takes Harry's body to Hogwarts and confronts the survivors triumphantly. Harry awakens and kills Voldemort in a wand battle. He destroys the Elder Wand.

Nineteen years later, Harry and Ginny Weasley put their children on the train to Hogwarts, as do Ron and Hermione.

The Hedgehog

France/Italy 2009

Director: Mona Achache

Intellectual snobbery is pretty much the entire point of Muriel Barbery's 2006 novel *The Elegance of the Hedgehog* – characters are valued according to how cultured they are, and the smart ones communicate their specialness to one another via covert references to Tolstoy and Ozu, as if they're living in some anti-intellectual police state rather than a posh apartment block on the Left Bank. Ironically, however, the book's combination of pretty language, pop philosophy and heartrending melodrama made it a mainstream hit, prized by the very populist boors its text so disdains. In France, it has sold well over a million copies.

Given such success, this film version is modest, but then it's hard to see how it could have been anything else; with its single apartment-block setting, its defiantly frumpy protagonist and its quiet, interior story, this was never going to be a glitzy undertaking. Thankfully, that means we get Josiane Balasko – that rare French actress not sold on her looks – and not some dressed-down bombshell in the role of Renée, the dowdy concierge who keeps her intellect a closely guarded secret from the wealthy inhabitants of her building. Balasko does a great deal with hooded eyes and a rare, brilliant smile; she's convincing both as a mannish scold and, once Renée meets suave new tenant Kakuro, as a blossoming flirt. As Kakuro, Igawa Togo doesn't have much to do – his character is one of those beatific outsiders who happen along in feelgood narratives to unstuck the stuck and unlock the locked-in – but he's persuasively attractive, and the pair's scenes together are sweetly played.

As in the book, the weakest point of the triangle is Paloma, the rich kid upstairs who knows everything about everything and intends to kill herself come her 12th birthday. It's no fault of the young actress Garance Le Guillermic, who's charismatic and acquits herself well; it's just that a

ravishing, multi-talented pubescent windbag whose lofty turn of phrase has her describing a hedgehog as "that falsely lethargic, staunchly private and terribly elegant creature" is always going to be hard to believe in. Paloma's suicidal impulse, unlike Renée's proud loneliness, never feels real.

The transition to film hasn't cured Barbery's story of its preciousness or its rather baffling association of intellectualism with social shame. Still, its neat narrative offers sentimental satisfaction, and Balasko's performance commands attention throughout. There's an advert-cheesy score but the film looks good, with judicious deployment of delicate little animations out of Paloma's head – and the odd Ozu reference, just to sort the sheep from the goats. **Hannah McGill**

CREDITS

Produced by
Anne-Dominique
Toussaint
Screenplay,
Adaptation, Dialogue
Mona Achache
Patrick Blossier
With the collaboration of
Jean-François Goyet
Freely inspired by
L'Elegance du hérisson
[The Elegance of the
Hedgehog] by Muriel
Barbery
Director of
Photography
Patrick Blossier
Editor
Julia Gregory
Art Director
Yves Brover
Original Music/Solo
Piano
Gabriel Yared
Sound
Jean-Pierre Duret
Arnaud Rolland
Nicolas Naegelen
Costumes
Catherine Bouchard

©Les Films des
Tournelles, Pathé
Production, France 2
Cinéma, Eagle Pictures,
Topaze Bleue
Production
Companies
Anne-Dominique
Toussaint presents a Les
Films des Tournelles,
Pathé, France 2 Cinéma,
Eagle Pictures, Topaze
Bleue co-production in
association with
Banque Populaire
Images 9

With the participation of
Canal+, CinéCinéma,
France 2
Developed with the
support of MEDIA

CAST

Josiane Balasko
Renée Michel
Garance Le Guillermic
Paloma Josse
Igawa Togo
Ozu Kakuro
Anne Brochet
Solange Josse
Ariane Ascaride
Manuela Lopes
Wladimir Yordanoff
Paul Josse
Sarah Le Picard
Colombe Josse
Jean-Luc Porraz
Jean-Pierre
Gisèle Casadesus
Madame de Broglie
Mona Heftré
Madame Meurisse
Samuel Achache
Tibère

Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Cinefile World

Horrible Bosses

USA 2011

Director: Seth Gordon

Certificate 15 97m 34s

As assembly-line studio comedies go, *Horrible Bosses* isn't without qualities. It strikes a good balance between giving free range to the improvisatory talents of the players, working from nametag-brief personality cues – Jason Bateman as Nick ('stified'), Charlie Day as Dale ('chippmunky') and Jason Sudeikis as Kurt ('walking hard-on'), grouped in the frame and left to bounce off one another – and sowing the script with enough call-back jokes for the whole thing not to seem haphazard. Moreover, director Seth Gordon knows how to play gags to the camera, working particularly well around cars: there's a good sight gag that plays on the huge turning radiuses of full-size suburbanite sedans while establishing the incompetence of their drivers; a slapstick moment with Dale failing an Indiana Jones last-minute slide under a closing garage door; and a framing registering all the principals' reactions when rolled up on by a police cruiser that's just about perfect.

Bateman's speciality portrait of white-collar asphyxiation is as perfectly measured out here as it was in Mike Judge's *Extract* (2009), but Judge's work is submerged in suburban verities and a rueful irony that Gordon's film misses. *Horrible Bosses* begins with a recession-era reality – the vice-grip that comes of being caught between a toxic office environment and the fearful certitude that any job is better than nothing – then quickly thereafter detaches from any recognisable world.

Gordon's film lives too much up to its title. Comedy often relies on exaggeration, of course, but caricature loses its sting when you can't at least faintly descry human features in it. The

best of the bad guys turns out not to be much of one; Jamie Foxx, on hand as presumed hitman 'Motherfucker' Jones, does very funny things with a simple cocktail straw. Whipping around an extravagant combover, Colin Farrell has a brief but pungent part as Kurt's new boss Bobby. Kevin Spacey as Dave, Nick's higher-up, delivers lines with a mouthful of cold spit and ill will – his reaction to a surprise party is especially good – though there's not much to do with a last act that requires him to transform from flannel-suited sadist into an actual arch fiend. This leaves Jennifer Aniston's grab-assy dentist to paw on Day, his hoarse, desperate performance the least harmonious in the trio of one-notes.

These straw-man villains will blow away long before the parade of vague, erratic, abusive or incompetent employers that *Seinfeld* did so well. Perhaps the problem isn't that these bosses are outright monsters but that the movie never lets their employees, our protagonists, seem monstrous in turn, jettisoning any sense of accountability. When the boys decide to rid the world of their bosses permanently, we root for them to take out the human garbage. But when their homicidal wishes are miraculously fulfilled despite their conscience-braked failure to act, there's no sense of culpability or moment of reckoning demanded of characters or audience – only a hard gearshift into action-comedy and plot twists whose outcome flatters disgruntled middle-management daydreams. When Nick and Dale decide they can't go through with their deadly assignments, the only comprehensible reason why is the reticence of the script to follow through on its own nihilism, assigning others to handle its protagonists' dirty work. Rather than a dark parody of yuppie fastidiousness or hands-off corporate ruthlessness, *Horrible Bosses* is, in this flinching cop-out, the very image of what it claims to hate.

Nick Pinkerton



Lobal warming: Charlie Day, Jennifer Aniston

SYNOPSIS Paris, the present. Eleven-year-old Paloma explains to camera that she intends to kill herself in 165 days, on her birthday. In the meantime she'll make a film detailing life's absurdities – largely those at play in her neurotic, snobbish family. Renée, concierge of Paloma's ritzy apartment block, lives alone and is treated dismissively by the tenants. When one of the residents dies, the vacated flat is taken by a Japanese man, Ozu Kakuro. A fan of Japanese cinema, Renée notes his name; when they meet, he is polite to her, and surprises her by understanding a reference she makes to Tolstoy. Paloma and Kakuro meet in the lift, and she impresses him by speaking Japanese. Ozu visits Paloma; they discuss Renée and her hidden 'elegance'. Renée receives an antique edition of *Anna Karenina* from Kakuro – and an invitation to dinner, which prompts her to panic about her appearance. Paloma amasses pills from her mother's stash for her planned suicide. Renée has her hair cut, and is pleasantly surprised by the result. Her date goes well, though chastely, and she and Kakuro plan another, to watch Ozu Yasujiro's *The Munekata Sisters* together. Paloma begins to visit Renée and talk with her. On their second date, Renée and Kakuro discuss their respective spouses, both dead of cancer. When she returns home, Renée admonishes herself for her romantic fantasies; convinced of her inadequacy, she turns down Kakuro's next invitation. A conversation with Paloma changes her mind. Kakuro delivers gifts of clothing and shoes to her, and they go out to celebrate his birthday. Paloma crushes up pills. Over sushi, Kakuro lets Renée know that a relationship between them is a possibility. The next day, attempting to get a homeless man out of the path of traffic, Renée is knocked down and killed. Paloma realises the true impact of death, and postpones her own.

CREDITS

Produced by
Brett Ratner
Jay Stern
Screenplay
Michael Markowitz
John Francis Daley
Jonathan Goldstein
Story
Michael Markowitz
Director of Photography
David Hennings
Editor
Peter Teschner
Production Designer
Shepherd Frankel
Music
Christopher YOUNG
Sound Mixer
Jeff Wexler
Costume Designer
Carol Ramsey

© [TBC]
Production Companies
New Line Cinema
presents a Rat
Entertainment
Production
Executive Producers
Toby Emmerich
Richard Brenner
Michael Disco
Samuel J. Brown
Diana Pokorny

CAST

Jason Bateman
Nick Hendricks
Charlie Day
Dale Arbus
Jason Sudeikis
Kurt Buckman
Jennifer Aniston
Dr Julia Harris
Colin Farrell
Bobby Pellit
Kevin Spacey
Dave Harken
Donald Sutherland
Jack Pellit

Julie Bowen
Rhonda Harken
Jamie Foxx
Dean 'MF' Jones
Dolby Digital/DTS/
SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Distributor
Warner Bros
Distributors (UK)
8,781 ft +0 frames



Little terror: Ross Marron, Theo Stevenson, Scarlett Stitt

Horrid Henry The Movie

United Kingdom 2011
Director: Nick Moore

Horrid Henry: The Movie begins with a one-man raid into hostile territory, shown in part through the infiltrator's hi-tech night-vision glasses – but we see that the assault is in fact being conducted in broad daylight by a young boy against his 'enemy number one' Moody Margaret, that his target is a mere chocolate box, and that his state-of-the-art goggles are just cardboard. "Hi, I'm Henry," says the boy (Theo Stevenson) to camera as he's called inside to do his homework, "and this is my world."

This prologue might lead viewers to expect a play on the double perspective of a pre-adolescent's fantasy and his more mundane reality – yet even when we aren't confined to the titular would-be hero's point of view, little here corresponds to reality. When Henry freezes in mid-air, headteacher Miss Oddbod (Rebecca Front) witnesses this breach of physical law with a petulant "Get down from there right now". When Great Aunt Greta (Prunella Scales), believing Henry to be a girl, enrolls him at her single-sex alma mater, Henry's parents raise no objections. And while Henry's harebrained schemes to save his state school from closure all prove irrelevant to the problem at hand, that problem is caused not by socioeconomic realities but by a rival headmaster (Richard E. Grant) given to bribery, abduction and other behaviour more suggestive of a Bond villain than a contemporary Middle England educator.

So Henry's world is one where little makes sense, and where his own actions merely coexist with, rather than affect, the main plot (which also makes no sense). The result is, frankly, an incoherent mess. Where Francesca

Simon's original short stories are inherently episodic, here arbitrary events accumulate without adding up to a cogent feature. Lucinda Whiteley's screenplay reduces the characters to the alliterative descriptors inherited from Simon's books, so that no one ever gets beyond a gurning caricature. The eclectically starry adult cast have been hauled in for their marquee recognition but given nothing to do. Even Anjelica Huston's myopic Miss Battle-Axe struggles to make more than a superficial impression.

There are lurid colours, desultory genre pastiches, random song-and-dance numbers and explosive incursions of animation into the live action, as well as the inevitable jokes about farts, snot and vomit. As if all this weren't irksomely in-your-face enough, it is also the first British children's film in 3D. It might be formally audacious, even innovative – but watching it is like being forced to experience a world hallucinated by a flatulent twentee idiot in the grip of ADHD and a sugar rush.

♦♦ **Anton Bitel**

CREDITS

Produced by
Rupert Preston
Lucinda Whiteley
Screenplay Written by
Lucinda Whiteley
Based on the characters
created by Francesca
Simon and illustrated by
Tony Ross
Director of Photography
Sam McCurdy
Editor
Simon Cozens
Production Designer
Richard Bullock
Music Composed by
Michael Price
Sound Mixer
Simon Willis
Costume Designer
Colleen Kelsall

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British Film Institute
Production Companies
A Vertigo Films/Novel
Entertainment
production in
association with Aegis
Film Fund, Presence
and Altus Productions
A UK Film Council
presentation
Made with the support
of the National Lottery
through the UK Film
Council's Film
Development Fund and
Film Fund
Executive Producers
Allan Niblo
Mike Watts
Nigel Williams

James Richardson
for Aegis:
James Swarbrick
for Presence:
Paul Brett
Tim Smith

CAST

Theo Stevenson
Horrid Henry
Richard E. Grant
Vic Van Wrinkle
Parminder Nagra
Miss Lovely
Mathew Horne
Dad
Noel Fielding
Ed Banger
Prunella Scales
Great Aunt Greta
David Schneider
Soggy Sid
Jo Brand

demon dinner lady
Siobhan Hayes
Mum
Helen Lederer
Rich Aunt Ruby
Rebecca Front
Miss Oddbod
Kimberley Walsh
Prissy Polly
Anjelica Huston
Miss Battle-Axe
Scarlett Stitt
Moody Margaret
Ross Marron
Perfect Peter

Dolby Digital
In Colour 3D
Distributor
Vertigo Films

SYNOPSIS England, the present. Horrid Henry is a brat who hates homework and dreams of becoming a rock star. His war of pranks with 'enemy number one' Moody Margaret leads to the dismissal of his teacher Miss Battle-Axe from Ashton Primary, and his own exclusion from the school's talent contest.

Vic Van Wrinkle, headmaster at Brick House private school, plots with a pair of corrupt inspectors to shut down Ashton Primary. Miss Lovely, the teacher of Henry's younger brother Perfect Peter, learns of Vic's plot and is kidnapped. Determined to save Ashton Primary, Henry resolves that he and his band must win the talent contest. They enter the contest disguised in girls' uniforms and win – but headteacher Miss Oddbod informs Henry that his celebrity can't stop the school's unfavourable inspection.

Henry is challenged by an anonymous 'terrible teacher' to appear on his favourite TV game show. On the show, he undergoes various school-themed trials, and wins. His challenger is revealed to be Miss Battle-Axe.

Peter, also captured by Vic, uses Miss Lovely's mobile phone to allow Miss Oddbod to overhear Vic's plan. Vic and the inspectors are arrested and Ashton Primary is saved. Henry keeps the money he won on the game show.



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ONE DAY
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includes
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& RICHARD III**



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includes (main pic)
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SKIN I LIVE IN** and
Oscar Winner
IN A BETTER WORLD
(Opening Gala)



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Retrospective inc.
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YELLOW ROLLS-R**



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ART OF GETTING BY
THE HELP**



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Retrospective
**INSPECTOR BELLAMY
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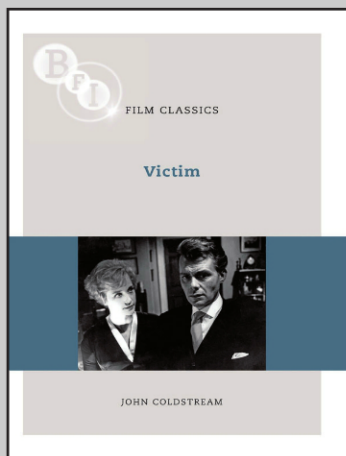


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In a Better World

Denmark/Sweden/Norway 2010
Director: Susanne Bier

Since winning this year's Academy Award for best foreign-language film, *In a Better World* has been greeted with a degree of bemusement by critics in the US, who acknowledge its gorgeous cinematography and impressive performances but tend to tut over its apparently glib morality. And they may have a point: the film begins by studiously paralleling the work of saintly Danish doctor Anton (Mikael Persbrandt), sticking people back together in an African war zone, and the plight of his son Elias (Markus Rygaard), facing the mindless brutality of the schoolyard. The message seems to be simple: Violence Is Bad. Likewise, the film ends with an act of revenge that yields devastating unintended consequences: Revenge Is Bad. So is this a beautifully acted, beautifully photographed sermon? Well, no. Because in between these monochromatic ethical anchors, morality shifts and heaves. Like the sea Anton and his son spend a lot of time gazing at, it never quite comes to rest.

There's a gremlin in the clockwork goodness machinery, and his name (not unironically) is Christian. Played with chillingly deadpan certainty by William Jøhnk Juel Nielsen, he is first seen calmly reading a poem at his mother's funeral and shrugging off his father's attempts to talk about grief. He's *absolutely fine*, which is of course exactly what's wrong with him: he crackles with repressed emotion and focuses the film's sense of impending, ineluctable doom. Like a latterday Holden Caulfield, Christian cuts through the pointless wittering of the adults around him, but we get a shocking awakening when he takes on the bully who has been making Elias's life a misery and now wants to add Christian to his hit list: in the first real act of violence in a film that has so far only spilt theoretical blood, Christian beats him viciously with a bicycle pump before pulling a knife and threatening to kill him. Sweet, goofy, friendless Elias is hooked: a mixture of adoration and fear now binds him to the most dangerous character in the film.

Set against Christian's conviction that right and wrong boil down to 'might is right' is Anton's equally uninflected assumption that all you need is love. In Africa, faced with the question of whether he should save the life of a warlord who carves up pregnant women for fun, he treats his wounds without question. Back in Denmark, he gets a slap from a thuggish car mechanic and tries to use the incident to teach Elias and Christian the value of turning the other cheek – and finds that his good intentions have precipitated the film's perilous denouement. His supposedly unimpeachable virtue is gradually revealed as something close to vanity, but he needs to maintain the fiction that life's hard questions can be



Home improvement: Mikael Persbrandt, Trine Dyrholm

solved by an easy aphorism, if only to avoid thinking about his own frailty – his lack of connection with the son distanced by a dodgy Skype line to Africa; his betrayal of his estranged wife. It's not just Christian's promise of protection that draws Elias to him: the perennial victim has learnt the hard way that his parents' cosy non-violence doesn't work in real life. Christian's solutions are swift, sure and satisfying; and what's more, there's nothing remotely phoney about them.

Is this the point then? Sure, by the time the credits roll we have been

reassured that most things can be sorted out with a hug and a chat, but the moments that linger in the mind all come from scenes of rage and grief and wild abandon. If this really is supposed to be a film with a pat moral message, then director Susanne Bier has messed up somewhere. More interesting to see it as an attempt – suggested by its original Danish title, which means 'Revenge' – to grapple with the nuances of good and evil and examine the limitations of virtue in the face of pure emotion.

♦♦ Lisa Mullen

CREDITS

Producer
Sisse Graum Jørgensen
Script Writer
Anders Thomas Jensen
Story
Susanne Bier
Anders Thomas Jensen
Director of Photography
Morten Søborg
Editors
Pernille Bech
Christensen
Morten Egholm
Production Design
Peter Grant
Composer/Piano
Johan Soderqvist
Sound Design
Eddie Simonsen
Anne Jensen
Costume Design
Manon Rasmussen

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Zentropa
Entertainments16
presents in co-operation
with Memphis Film
International, Trollhattan
Film, Film i Väst, Det
Danske Filminstitut, DR
- Danmarks Radio, SVT,
FilmFyn, Svenska
Filminstitutet, Nordisk
Film & TV Fond a film by
Susanne Bier
Produced by Zentropa
Entertainments16 ApS
In co-production with
Memphis Film
International, DR, SVT -
Sveriges Television
(Gunnar Carlsson), Film
i Väst (Tomas
Eskilsson), Trollhattan
Film (Madeleine
Ekman)
With support from The
Danish Film Institute
under the 60/40

Scheme, FilmFyn (Lars
Hermann), Nordisk
Film- och TV-Fond
(Hanne Palmquist),
Svenska Filminstitutet
(Peter 'Piodor'
Gustafsson)
With the support of the
MEDIA Programme of
the European Union
Executive Producers
Peter Aalbak Jensen
Peter Garde

CAST

Mikael Persbrandt
Anton
Trine Dyrholm
Marianne
Ulrich Thomsen
Claus
William Jøhnk Juel Nielsen
Christian
Markus Rygaard
Elias

Gabriel Muli
Tolk
Elsebeth Steentoft
Signe
Satu Helena Mikkelsen
Hanna
Camilla Gottlieb
Eva

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Axiom Films Limited

Danish theatrical title
Hævnen

The Interrupters

USA/United Kingdom/Canada/
Norway/Sweden/Denmark 2011
Director: Steve James

CREDITS

Produced by
Alex Kotlowitz
Steve James
Inspired by a 'New York Times Magazine' article by
Alex Kotlowitz
Photographed by
Steve James
Edited by
Aaron Wickenden
Steve James
Original Music Composed by
Joshua Abrams
Sound Recordist
Zak Piper

©Kartemquin Films
Production Companies
Kartemquin Films
presents for WGBH/
Frontline, The
Independent Television
Services (ITVS) and
BBC Storyville in
association with Rise
Films a film by Steve
James and Alex
Kotlowitz
Funding provided by
The Independent
Television Service
(ITVS),
WGBH/Frontline, The
John D. and Catherine T.
MacArthur Foundation,
The British
Broadcasting
Corporation (BBC),
CBC News Network,
The Documentary
Channel
Supported by a grant
from Sundance
Documentary Film
Program
Funding Provided by
The Richard H. Driehaus
Foundation, Norwegian
Broadcasting
Corporation (NRK).

Sveriges Television AB
(SVT), The Danish
Broadcasting
Corporation (DR),
Corporation for Public
Broadcasting
Executive Producers
for Kartemquin Films:
Justine Nagan
Gordon Quinn
for Rise Films:
Teddy Leifer
Paul Taylor
for ITVS:
Sally Jo Fifer
for Frontline:
David Fanning

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Dogwoof Pictures



Breaking it up is hard to do: 'The Interrupters'

SYNOPSIS Chicago, 2009-10. Tio Hardiman, director of CeaseFire's 'Violence Interrupters' Program, has assembled a team of ex-criminals and gang members to help intervene in disputes before they turn violent.

'Summer': Epidemiologist Gary Slutkin explains that violence is equivalent to medieval plagues, and can be similarly cured via behavioural changes. Gangster's daughter Ameena Matthews and former drug trafficker Cobe Williams work as Interrupters. Cobe arranges a tense meeting between Latoya Oliver and her estranged sons Kenneth and Bud. Ameena mentors Caprysha Anderson, a teenager with severe behavioural problems.

'Fall': Mobile-phone footage of 16-year-old Derrion Albert's murder is widely circulated. Interrupter Eddie Bocanegra argues against a heavy police crackdown. Ameena gives Caprysha a makeover. Tio arranges a debate between representatives from warring territories.

'Winter': After the hot-headed Flamo is framed, Cobe talks him out of revenge. Tio visits the first Interrupter to get shot on the job. Ameena makes a speech at another teenager's funeral. Eddie advises teenagers how to express themselves through art. Cobe meets 17-year-old Lil Mikey Davis as he leaves jail.

'Spring': Eddie does good deeds to mark the anniversary of the murder he committed. Lil Mikey visits the barbershop that he robbed at 15 and gives a heartfelt apology. He gets a job, which he performs conscientiously. Ameena and Caprysha argue over the latter's poor school attendance.

'Epilogue': Latoya is reconciled with her son Kenneth. Tio suggests recruiting Lil Mikey. Derrion's killers are convicted. Ameena visits Caprysha in the Illinois Youth Center. Flamo gets a job as a subway security guard.



Just Do It A Tale of Modern-day Outlaws

United Kingdom/USA 2011

Director: Emily James

Certificate 12A 90m 14s

This behind-the-scenes portrait of UK climate-change activists is neither an analysis of their attitudes and approaches nor a battle cry for their cause. It's not cool-headed enough to be the former, nor informative enough to be the latter.

Rather, this proves to be a cheerfully partisan backslapping exercise, too in love with the idea of civil disobedience to bother explaining, analysing or querying it, and blithely certain that no one watching could possibly occupy a different sector of the political spectrum from its maker and subjects. *Just Do It* doesn't even bother preaching to the converted: it simply assumes that converted is the only way to be. This hermetic ideological approach, combined with a cutesy, informal narration and an emphasis on fun, partying and eccentricity, won't do much to counter assumptions about the student protest movement being dominated by ditty dilettantes with a vague anti-authority agenda in place of a thought-through creed.

Director Emily James clearly went very native indeed during the year she spent filming the planning and execution of covert protest operations – she has noted in interviews that her refusal to be critical of the protesters prevented her film being bought by a UK broadcast network. While her passion is evidently sincere, her unwillingness to permit analysis or argument blocks the effectiveness of her film as either a record or a campaigning document. Objectivity is off the table as soon as police showing up at a Climate Change street party are referred to as "uninvited party poopers"; Peter Mandelson is called a "slimy politician". Perhaps we can blame Michael Moore for the now pervasive strain of puerile us-and-them name-calling in issue documentaries. Quite what the campaigners are against never gets much more precise than "capitalists"; just what it is they want in place of the coal-fired power station they attempt to

SYNOPSIS A documentary in which film-maker Emily James follows a group of UK climate-change activists over the course of a year. Narrator James, himself an activist, introduces various protesters over footage of their participation in the April 2009 G20 protests in London, during which newspaper seller Ian Tomlinson was killed. He notes that since Tomlinson's death police have been on "a PR offensive". Another activist, Marina, provides food for sacked workers occupying a wind-turbine factory. Sally, a former Cambridge student, explains why she finds activism more fulfilling than academic life. She and other activists learn that the next Climate Camp protest will be in Blackheath, south London. Activists meet there and plan a peaceful occupation of the Royal Bank of Scotland's City HQ. Members of the Plane Stupid movement, who oppose the opening of a third runway at Heathrow airport, move into villages threatened by the expansion. Marina is arrested at the wind-turbine factory. Other activists occupy a coal power station. Large numbers of activists travel to Copenhagen to disrupt the 2009 climate summit, and are suppressed by police.



Pro-activist: 'Just Do It'

shut down doesn't get much screentime either. They hate the police showing up at their stunts but hate it even more if they don't ("You can't get a copper when you need one!" mourns protester Marina at a disappointingly un-busted Climate Change camp); they refer to themselves as "outlaws" but are horrified when they're arrested; they want something done but their disdain for all authority renders it unclear just who they think should do what. Perhaps, indeed, the revelation of this sort of doublethink is what is most revealing and useful about the film.

Presumably the possibilities offered by crowd-funding and self-distribution will permit more films of this scratchy, unmediated, highly personal nature to get out there and be seen. That's great news for self-motivated filmmakers with passion projects; but *Just Do It* represents a case where a responsible producer with a bit of emotional distance and an eye on reaching and touching an audience might have made all the difference. **Hannah McGill**

CREDITS

Produced by

Lauren Simpson

Edited by

Emily James

Art Director

Dr D

Sound Design

Pip Norton

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Dartmouth Films

Production

Companies

Left Field Films presents

in association with

Cinereach, The Bertha

Foundation, NFTS, The

Dog Factory

Made possible with the

help from Artist Project

Earth, The Lipman

Miliband Trust, Tipping

Point Film Fund and our

447 crowd funders

Executive Producers

Christopher Hird

Chris Atkins

Emily James

Nik Powell

Dick Fontaine

Ciaran Mullaney

Gareth Mullaney

WITH

James Leadbitter

narrated by

In Colour

[1.78:1]

Distributor

Dartmouth Films

8,121 ft +0 frames

Kill List

United Kingdom/
Sweden/Australia 2011

Director: Ben Wheatley

Kill List opens with married couple Jay (Neil Maskell) and Shel (MyAnna Buring) having a loud argument while their seven-year-old son Sam plays in the living room. Jay, a pill-popping Iraq War veteran, has been unemployed for eight months, complaining of various ailments that Shel insists are "all in [his] fucking head", and the family finances are fast running out. "Wake up, Jay!" Shel shouts, trying to shake him from his insulated torpor, in a line that will recur several more times in different contexts. Shortly afterwards, their dinner guests – Jay's fellow veteran Gal (Michael Smiley) and his new girlfriend Fiona (Emma Fryer) – arrive and the tensions between Jay and Shel explode into a vicious row. Yet there might be a way out of Jay's predicament: despite unspecified problems the last time they worked together in Kiev, Gal (said by Fiona to be in commercial sales) invites Jay to join him once again on the road. Why, though, has Fiona secretly carved a strange sigil (also seen in animated form in the film's first frames) into the back of her hosts' bathroom mirror?

This extended opening sequence is marked by the same sort of fly-on-the-wall naturalism harnessed by director/co-writer Ben Wheatley's debut feature *Down Terrace* (2009) – and anyone familiar with that film will be expecting the surface of banal domestic dysfunction to conceal a dark strain of ultraviolent criminality. In this case, Jay and Gal are a pair of hired hitmen, though that's only one of many surprises in a film that offers a disorienting blend of genres and blur of perspectives. Here the devil is in the details, and even the most offhand comment or most casual-seeming scene (including the family's horseplay in their garden) comes to resonate in unexpected ways as the plot twists its way from mundane realism to a horrific kind of surrealism. As Jay and Gal work through the list of three names provided by 'the Client' (Struan Rodger), Jay will emerge as an unstable, angry man in need of targets on whom he can unleash all his pent-up aggression. Such a boorishly violent person hardly seems best placed to puzzle out the increasingly Lynchian enigmas that surround his assignment, leaving the viewer with the task of what the Client (who makes Jay sign his contract in blood) refers to as "reconstruction".

All at once funny, thrilling, mysterious, shocking and tragic, *Kill List* entertains throughout while keeping viewers constantly on their toes and maintaining its narrative ambiguities to the very end. Whether (and this is something of a spoiler) we imagine that we have witnessed a *Wicker Man*-style conspiracy of entrapment or a deranged insider's view on post-traumatic stress disorder, Wheatley gives us plenty to unpick about masculinity and madness.

Anton Bitel

CREDITS

Produced by
Claire Jones
Andy Starke
Written by
Ben Wheatley
Amy Jump
Additional dialogue by
the cast
Director of
Photography
Laurie Rose
Editors
Robin Hill
Ben Wheatley
Amy Jump
Production Designer
David Butterworth
Music
Jim Williams
Sound Design
Martin Pavey
Costume Designer
Lance Milligan

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Television, UK Film
Council, Warp X, Rook
Films
Production
Companies
A Warp X/Rook Films
Production for Film4,
UK Film Council and
Screen Yorkshire
In association with
Nonstop Entertainment
AB and Madman
Entertainment
Made with the support
of The UK Film Council's
New Cinema Fund and
The Screen Yorkshire
Production Fund
Developed with the
assistance of Film4

Executive Producers
Katherine Butler
Hugo Heppell
Robin Gutch

CAST

Neil Maskell
Jay
MyAnna Buring
Shel
Harry Simpson
Sam
Michael Smiley
Gal
Emma Fryer
Fiona
Struan Rodger
the Client
Esme Folley
hotel receptionist
Ben Crompton
Justin
Gemma Lise Thornton
Kiera
Robin Hill
Stuart

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Optimum Releasing



Don't throw your glove away: 'Knuckle'

Knuckle

United Kingdom/Ireland 2011

Director: Ian Palmer

SYNOPSIS Iraq War veteran Jay's chronic moodiness and unemployment have created frictions with his wife Shel which the couple struggle to conceal from their seven-year-old son Sam. Jay's fellow veteran Gal comes to dinner with his new girlfriend Fiona. Shel is delighted when Gal invites him to renew their partnership as professional hitmen. Fiona conceals a strange sigil behind the mirror in Jay and Shel's bathroom. Made to sign a contract in blood by the mysterious 'Client', Jay and Gal set off with a list of three targets. 'The Priest' smiles and thanks Jay just before he is shot dead. Investigating 'the Librarian', Jay and Gal discover a stash of violent child-porn videos; the Librarian expresses his gratitude for having met Jay even as Jay hammers him to death. Jay goes to the video-makers' address (provided by the Librarian) and kills two more men. Worried both by a dossier on himself and Jay found in the Librarian's safe, and also by Jay's increasingly psychotic violence, Gal says he wants to quit. The Client threatens to kill not only Jay and Gal but their families too if the contract is not completed. Shel and Sam go into hiding at a cottage.

Camping in the woodland grounds of 'the MP', Jay and Gal witness a woman being hanged in a nocturnal pagan ritual. Jay fires on the masked celebrants and, after Gal is stabbed by a masked pursuer, puts his friend out of his misery. Knocked unconscious outside the cottage, Jay awakes surrounded by celebrants, and is made to have a knife fight with the monstrous, masked 'Hunchback'. After Jay has repeatedly stabbed his assailant, everyone is unmasked.

Ian Palmer's *Knuckle* is a difficult film to categorise. On one level, this is a documentary about bare-knuckle boxing. On another, it's a story of feuding families with enmities stretching back generations. On yet another, it's a study of the Irish Traveller community, who've rarely before been shown on camera in such intimate detail. The film boasts very lively characters and some brutal fight scenes; what it doesn't have is anything approaching a structured storyline. Palmer began filming the McDonaghs in 1997 when he was invited to video the wedding of one of their daughters; he struck up a rapport with them and, over more than 12 years, periodically returned to document their lives.

The bare-knuckle boxing bouts included in the film make disconcerting viewing. Some of the fighters, especially James Quinn McDonagh, are highly skilled, but the fights – which go on until someone quits or is too incapacitated to continue – are messy, attritional affairs. Seen in a documentary, without the sound editing and rapid cutting you find in boxing movies, they make surprisingly anti-climactic viewing. For all their brutality, they remain ritualised events with very strict rules, and there's a dignity about them (at least when overweight grandfathers aren't fighting each other) that isn't there at all in the boasting and goading and trash-talking videos that surround them.

Palmer hints throughout that he will provide an explanation for the bitter feud between the McDonaghs and a rival family, the Joyces. There are fleeting references to manslaughter charges and fights at weddings, but no one offers precise reasons for the hostility. Nor is the obsession with bare-knuckle boxing as a way of resolving it explained. One theory is

that by having their champions slug each other on country lanes or in car parks, the families are able to displace anger that might otherwise boil over into full warfare. You begin to suspect, though, that it has just as much to do with delinquent masculinity and love of fighting for its own sake. What Palmer does make apparent is how the fighting becomes part of family culture and tradition: if a man wins a fight, his beaten opponent's son is sure to want revenge, even if it takes decades.

The fighters themselves are personable and often very articulate. James Quinn McDonagh is the kind of character you might find in a John Ford film, a big man with a decency and charisma about him, albeit combined with a taste for renegade behaviour. His younger brother Michael, who disgraces himself by biting his opponent in a fight, is likewise an engaging (if headstrong) character. The same can be said about their opponents, with the exception of Joe Joyce, ageing patriarch of the Joyce clan, whose handlebar moustache and reams of fat make him look like a character from an Asterix cartoon. He boasts on camera how he douses his hands in petrol to make them hard as rock, and shows a primitive relish for the damage he can still inflict on opponents. Palmer acknowledges that filming Joe's preposterous and degrading bout with another paunchy grandfather made him question just why he was

drawn to filming bare-knuckle fights.

As the director has explained, *Knuckle* is a film that emerged in the editing. Material assembled over many years was moulded into feature length by Palmer and his editor Ollie Huddleston (known for his work with Kim Longinotto); their skill in putting the film together is evident but *Knuckle* remains frustratingly open-ended. It's not a documentary-maker's task to impose an artificial structure on footage. Nonetheless, the key question as to why the families fight is never really answered. ➡ **Geoffrey Macnab**

CREDITS

Produced by
Ian Palmer
Teddy Leifer
Cinematography
Michael Doyle
Ian Palmer
Editor
Ollie Huddleston
Original Music
Ilan Eshken
Jessica Dannheisser
Recording Engineer
Joe Kearns

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Seaford Films Limited
Production
Companies
RISE films presents
In association with
Seaford Films
With the participation of
Bord Scannán na
hÉireann/the Irish Film
Board
A film by Ian Palmer

Executive Producers
Nick Fraser
Alan Maher

WITH

James Quinn
McDonagh
Michael McDonagh
Paddy 'The Lurcher'
Joyce
'Big' Paul Joyce
Joe Joyce

In Colour

Distributor
Revolver Entertainment

ft frames

SYNOPSIS Over a 12-year period, filmmaker Ian Palmer documents feuding and bare-knuckle fighting among the Irish Traveller community.

There is a longstanding feud between the McDonagh family and the Joyce family, exacerbated by an incident several years ago when a McDonagh was involved in the death of a member of the Joyce family. The two rival clans make goading videos, calling one another out for fights. When these fights take place, they are strictly refereed by members of a third family.

James Quinn McDonagh is a champion bare-knuckle boxer who is keen to retire but is continually called on to fight the Joyces and other families. When he does finally stop, he helps to coach family members, among them his headstrong brother Michael, who disgraced himself by biting a Joyce in a fight in the 1980s.

A fight is arranged between Michael and the Joyce he bit. Michael recovers his honour, and there appears to be a rapprochement between the two families. However, the film reveals that the feud springs up again.

Mr. Popper's Penguins

USA 2011

Director: Mark Waters

Certificate PG 94m 13s

Teaching the familiar family-movie lesson that hardworking fathers unthinkingly neglect their families and must endanger their jobs in order to win over their kids, *Mr. Popper's Penguins* bears almost no relation to Florence and Richard Atwater's 1938 children's book, a staple of American elementary school classrooms. There, a poor housepainter nearly goes bankrupt taking care of a family of penguins. The cinematic *Mr. Popper's Penguins* is strictly confined to the tonier parts of Manhattan, and Tom Popper (Jim Carrey) is now a real-estate agent with a spacious apartment; his goal isn't to avoid poverty and loneliness but to make partner at his firm. Aside from the venial sins of belonging to the snake-oil-salesman school of business and being divorced, Carrey is polite to service people without being condescending, courteous to his female assistant without hitting on her, a hard worker and on good terms with his ex-wife and two kids; it's hard to see why he should have to learn a moral lesson.

Nonetheless, moral improvement arrives in the form of penguins from Popper's late explorer father. Predictable havoc is wreaked, but Tom's children love the penguins so they stay, with Tom shovelling snow indoors and shivering through the night to provide for his new charges. This distracts Tom from the task he must perform: purchasing the Tavern on the Green, a restaurant in Central Park owned by Mrs Van Gundy (Angela Lansbury), whose family has always controlled the property. In reality, the establishment opened in 1934 and changed owners multiple times before going bankrupt in 2009; the property is currently owned by Donald Trump, whose Trump Wollman Skating Park is also featured in the film. The movie's world is strictly confined to affluent Manhattan: high-society heiress Van Gundy is friends with Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who eventually helps Popper out with his penguin predicament. All problems here can be resolved with money, which is never in short supply, and the film rarely ventures far from midtown.

Despite being defecated on by a penguin (twice) and literally having to squeeze the shit out of the birds, Carrey maintains his dignity, displaying a few flashes of his 1990s-era flexibility and timing: his Jimmy Stewart imitation is spot-on, and a moment where he pours champagne in his ear, spits it out and tosses the bottle in a bin in one fluid motion will be catnip for old-school fans. Whenever not being upstaged by CGI-enhanced farting avians, Carrey and a stacked supporting cast – including a predictably unctuous Clark Gregg as an evil zookeeper and rising British actress Ophelia Lovibond as Popper's alliteration-prone assistant – bring smiles if not laughs.



Beak house: Jim Carrey

Director Mark Waters (*Mean Girls*) and cinematographer Florian Ballhaus keep things moving but it's hard to hit any peak with material like this: when the words "A Mark Waters Film" are blown off screen by an animated penguin's fart during the end credits, it sums up the problem.

♦♦ Vadim Rizov

CREDITS

Produced by
John Davis
Screenplay
Sean Anders
John Morris
Jared Stern
Based upon the novel by
Richard Atwater,
Florence Atwater
Director of Photography
Florian Ballhaus
Film Editor
Bruce Green
Production Designer
Stuart Wurtzel
Music Composed and Conducted by
Rolle Kent
Sound Design
Mark Mangini
Costume Designer
Ann Roth

Visual Effects and Animation
Rhythm & Hues Studios
Visual Effects
[hy*drau*lx]
Centro Digital Pictures
Limited

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©TCF Hungary Film Rights Exploitation Limited Liability Company, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation and Dune Entertainment III LLC (in Brazil, Italy, Japan, Korea and Spain)
Production Companies
Twentieth Century Fox

presents a Davis Entertainment Company production
A Mark Waters film
Made in association with Dune Entertainment
Filmed with the support of the New York State Governor's Office for Motion Picture & Television Development
Executive Producers
Jessica Tuchinsky
Mark Waters
Derek Dauchy
Joel Gotler
Film Extracts
Modern Times (1936)
The Circus (1928)
The Gold Rush (1925; re-released with soundtrack in 1942)
Shoulder Arms (1918)

David Krumholtz
Kent
Phillip Baker Hall
Franklin
Angela Lansbury
Mrs Van Gundy
Maxwell Perry Cotton
Billy
James Tupper
Rick

Dolby Digital/DTS/ SDDS
Colour/Prints by
DeLuxe
[L85:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox
International (UK)

8,479 ft +8 frames

CAST

Jim Carrey
Mr Tom Popper
Carla Gugino
Amanda
Ophelia Lovibond
Pippi
Madeline Carroll
Janie
Clark Gregg
Nat Jones
Jeffrey Tambor
Mr Gremmins

SYNOPSIS After a short prologue in which we see Tom Popper growing up without his explorer father, the action moves to present-day Manhattan, where Tom is now a successful real-estate agent. In order to become his firm's newest partner, Tom must convince Mrs Van Gundy to sell the Tavern on the Green, a Central Park restaurant owned by her family for three generations. He fails to impress her at their first meeting.

When his father dies, Tom is sent a penguin as an inheritance. Five more penguins arrive. Tom's ex-wife Amanda arrives with children Janie and Billy. The children adore the birds and Tom agrees to keep them. After one of the penguins' eggs fails to hatch, Tom realises that the birds need a proper home and turns them over to the zoo. He takes Janie and Billy to the zoo; discovering that villainous zookeeper Nat Jones plans to send the penguins in pairs to different zoos, they free the birds and arrive with them at Mrs Van Gundy's press conference. Tom makes an impassioned speech about the restaurant's importance to his childhood, since it was virtually the only place he saw his father.

Mrs Van Gundy sells the property to Tom and arranges for the birds to be taken back to Antarctica. Tom and his wife are reunited. The family release the birds into the wild and promise to return every year.

One Day

USA/United Kingdom 2011

Director: Lone Scherfig

Certificate 12A 107m 52s

If one of the key themes of David Nicholls's ubiquitous novel *One Day* is that reality is rarely what we were expecting, then no one can have been more aware of this than Lone Scherfig. Charged with adapting a story that has, for certain adult audiences, the same obsessive, possessive hold that the *Twilight* franchise exerts over adolescent girls, Scherfig has had to negotiate two major stumbling blocks. The first is the casting of the gamine and graceful Hollywood actress Anne Hathaway as a spoddy, spotty and deeply sarcastic Yorkshire lass (a decision that had outraged many fans even before the film's release). The second is the transfer of Nicholls's tricky structuring device, which revisits Emma and Dexter, a couple of will-they-won't-they-be-lovers on the same day each year, beginning with their university graduation in 1988 and ending a quarter of a century later in the present day.

Nicholls has described the book's conceit as being "like flicking through a photo album", so one would perhaps expect it to lend itself nicely to film. And in a way it does, since the lacunae its structure creates take the classic coy cutaway to its logical conclusion. We never see, for example, the night when Emma and Dexter finally consummate their relationship, only its consequences. On the other hand, the editing is occasionally a little too smooth: the snap of a bra strap becomes the pop of a toaster, the years slide seamlessly past, and at times the film appears in danger of becoming one long montage sequence. The jarring rupture between the end of one chapter and the beginning of another is lost in the seamless continuity of cinema.

Scherfig's polished period piece smooths out some of the novel's rougher edges, then, but also infuses it with the same warmth, wit and understatement the director brought to her 2008 adaptation of Lynn Barber's *An Education*. In one moving scene towards the film's end, two longstanding romantic rivals are brought together by mutual loss, but it's made clear this isn't the beginning of a beautiful friendship: "I don't think that's necessary," one of them politely notes. Given that its narrative spans some 20 years and culminates in the final, long-delayed romantic union of its central pairing, it might seem somewhat perverse to compare *One Day* to *Brief Encounter* (1945). And yet there is something so quintessentially British – so *decent* – about this tale of yearning, missed opportunities, whimsy and what-ifs that the spectre of David Lean's masterpiece haunts it from afar. The nostalgic tone carries through into the film's *mise en scène*, which captures end-of-the-century Britain, through Thatcher-era to New Labour days, with delicate detail, from the posters on the walls of Emma's student digs to the cut of Dexter's 50rs, to the barely

perceptible shifts in the colour palette as each year passes into the next.

And what of the much maligned Hathaway? Well, she's not bad. But she's not great either: her accent is erratic, and there's too much doe-eyed mooning for Emma to resolve into a crisp character in her own right. Instead she ends up serving as a romantic foil for Jim Sturgess's Dexter – a charming, posh gadabout who (some scene-stealing support from Rafe Spall and Ken Stott notwithstanding) provides the

film's most complex portrait. While Emma remains sensible, stoic and beautiful throughout the course of their 20-year friendship, Dexter is dragged kicking and bleeding into middle age, suffering the greatest losses, and wearing on his increasingly haggard face the distressing discovery that "the future isn't what I thought it would be". Part of the originality of Nicholls's novel was that it was a game of two halves. Scherfig's film, however, is a one-man show. **➡ Catherine Wheatley**

CREDITS

Produced by
Nina Jacobson
Screenplay
David Nicholls
Based on his book
Director of Photography
Benoit Delhomme
Editor
Barney Pilling
Production Designer
Mark Tildesley
Music
Rachel Portman
Sound Designer
Glenn Freeman
Costume Designer
Odile Dicks-Mireaux

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Production Companies
Focus Features and Random House Films present in association with Film4 a Color Force production
A Lone Scherfig film
Executive Producer
Tessa Ross

CAST

Anne Hathaway
Emma Morley
Jim Sturgess
Dexter Mayhew

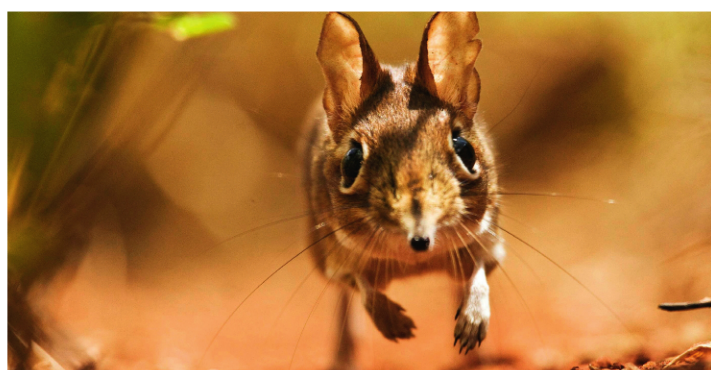
Patricia Clarkson
Alison
Ken Stott
Steven
Romola Garai
Sylvie
Rafe Spall
Ian
Tom Mison
Callum
Jodie Whittaker
Tilly
Tim Key
customer
Josephine de la Baume
Marie
Heida Reed
Ingrid

Amanda Fairbank-Hynes
Tara

Dolby Digital/DTS Colour by
DeLuxe
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures International UK & Eire

9,708 ft +0 frames



Field day: 'One Life'

One Life

United Kingdom/USA 2011

Directors: Michael Gunton, Martha Holmes

Certificate U 84m 41s

The latest wildlife documentary from the BBC's Natural History Unit to have been conceived for theatrical release, *One Life* closely adheres to the template of its predecessors. As with 2003's oceanic survey *Deep Blue* and 2007's globetrotting migration chronicle *Earth* (which retooled footage from landmark TV productions *The Blue Planet* and *Planet Earth* respectively), the film conflates key segments from another recent series, *Life*, paring down an underpinning thesis on the shared instinct for self-preservation inhabiting all organic life. Again, the big-screen transition is notable for the absence of David Attenborough's august tones, replaced here by earnest narration from Daniel Craig. Otherwise, the format is familiar – spectacular, painstakingly acquired images set to a score by George Fenton that ekes out comedy and pathos from the filmed animals' tribulations. The HD footage, showcasing new advances in camera technology, indisputably warrants the larger canvas.

But *One Life* also justifies its feature length by building a consistent narrative, compensating for the lack of sprawling depth afforded a TV series by maintaining a focus on animals' linked survival drives. As the cameras bounce around the continents, they capture a wildly disparate gallery of creatures, observing the ways in which they protect their young, evade prey, hunt and sometimes endure Sisyphean ordeals in order to propagate the species. These strategies are often ingenious and, occasionally, the source of cinematic grace notes. A riveting segment showing an ibex's shrewd escape from a red fox – the pursued clinging to an unapproachable mountain outcrop as the camera pulls back further and further – gives it fresh blood. Other arresting escapes almost trump it – glimpses of a Jesus Christ Lizard walking (or more accurately, skating) on water to bamboozle its foe, or a 'pebble toad' plummeting off cliffs to flee tarantulas as wacky as a Tex Avery cartoon. A revealing look at capuchin monkeys' survivalist nous, meanwhile, plays out

like 2001: *A Space Odyssey's* Dawn of Man prologue: after figuring out how to soften rock-hard palm nuts, the monkeys jubilantly smash them on stones in ultra slow motion.

One Life does intermittently betray its TV origins; it can come off a little choppy and crammed, where a series would have room to manoeuvre. But it's thematically cohesive, even if the structure sometimes plays second fiddle to the dazzling visuals.

➡ **Matthew Taylor**

CREDITS

Produced by
Martin Pope
Michael Rose
Written by
Michael Gunton
Martha Holmes
Photography
James Aldred
Doug Allan
Tony Allen
Doug Anderson
Barrie Britton
Keith Brust
Rod Clarke
Rod Clarke
Martin Colbeck
Bob Cranston
Jason Ellison
Tom Fitz
Kevin Flay
Ted Giffords
Nick Guy
Charlie Hamilton-James
Jason Isley
Simon King
Richard Kirby
Alastair MacEwen
David McKay
Jamie McPherson
Justin Maguire
Dave Manton
Hugh Maynard
Hugh Miller
Roger Munns
Peter Nearhos
Didier Noirot
Andrew Penniket
Rick Rosenthal
Tim Shepherd
Gavin Thurston
Stephen de Vere

Simon Werry
Kazutaka Yokoyama
Edited by
David Freeman
Music Composed by
George Fenton
Supervising Re-recording Mixer
Tim Cavagin

©BBC Earth Productions (Life) Limited
Production Companies
BBC Earth presents in association with IM Global a BBC Earth production in association with Magic Light Pictures
Executive Producers
Amanda Hill
Neil Nightingale
Joe Oppenheimer
Martyn Freeman
Marcus Arthur

WITH

Daniel Craig
narrated by

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Kaleidoscope Home Entertainment

7,621 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS A nature documentary examining how various animal species from all over the world share a common fundamental survival instinct. The film chronicles the everyday struggle to sustain life, looking at the ways animals protect their offspring, evade predators, hunt their prey and work together within family units. The essential drive to propagate the species is also explored, as animals endure tribulations and occasionally make sacrifices to ensure the arrival of the next generation.



Match of the day: Jim Sturgess, Anne Hathaway

SYNOPSIS Edinburgh, 15 July 1988. The day after graduating from university, bookish northerner Emma and charming, wealthy southerner Dexter have an abortive one-night stand. The film charts their subsequent friendship by visiting them on the same day for the next two decades. Initially, Dexter's star rises as he becomes a successful TV presenter; Emma, meanwhile, is stuck waitressing in a Mexican restaurant. As the years pass, Emma moves in with would-be comic Ian and retraining as a teacher, while Dexter slips into alcoholism and drug abuse, eventually losing his job. Appalled by his behaviour, Emma ends the friendship.

Four years later, the pair are reunited at a mutual friend's wedding. Emma has broken up with Ian; Dexter is engaged to upper-class Sylvie, who is expecting his child. They divorce after Sylvie cheats on Dexter, and in 2003 Dexter visits Emma, now a successful children's book author, in Paris, to declare his love. The pair become a romantic couple.

They marry, and the next three years pass peacefully, though their attempts to have a child are unsuccessful. In 2006, Emma is knocked off her bike and killed. Dexter is distraught, but as time passes he learns to live with his loss. In 2011 he takes his daughter to visit Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh, where, we learn, he and Emma spent their first morning in 1988 together.

Our Day Will Come

France 2010

Director: Romain Gavras

Certificate: not submitted 83m

A red-haired teenager is shot in the head and another one blown to bits by the US Army – these are images that got Romain Gavras's recent music video *Born Free* for British rapper M.I.A. pulled from YouTube. Graphic violence, political incorrectness and redheads also figure heavily in Gavras's follow-up first feature *Our Day Will Come* (the title is borrowed from one of the IRA's mantras). Whereas in *Born Free* redheads were a minority somehow linked with terrorism, and as such hunted down and executed, in *Our Day Will Come* the alienation experienced by minorities is incarnated in the figure of Rémy, an isolated young redhead who lives in a godforsaken small industrial town and is bullied even by his own family. When Rémy finally cracks and attacks his mother and sister, demotivated psychiatrist Patrick (Vincent Cassel), another redhead, joins forces with him in what becomes a delirious rampage of violence en route to a ferry to Ireland, which Rémy desperately fantasises as a place where redheads can live happily.

Standing in direct opposition to the contained violence of Bruno Dumont's *L'Humanité* (1999), Gavras also sets his film in a similar small-town universe, placing his alienated characters in a decidedly social-realist frame. A sort of oblique rite-of-passage/buddy-trip, *Our Day Will Come* stands as a crude metaphor for any type of minority and all manner of social abuses perpetrated by mainstream society, in this case French, which Patrick regularly diagnoses as rotten to the core.

It doesn't take long for the premise to deflate. And whereas in Gavras's music videos – regardless of how offensive you find them – the extreme consequences of the ills of society are what drives the action, putting him in close proximity to his fellow countryman Gaspar Noé, here the clownish awkwardness of the characters and the absurdity of their objective aren't funny or surreal enough to hold the film together. If anything, the argument is so feeble that when the

violence reaches its peak, the characters have long since become caricatures, and the film akin to some weird hybrid of *Fight Club* and *Dumb and Dumber*. The latter would surely have been a more accurate title for this film.

➡ **Mar Diestro-Dópido**

CREDITS

Produced by
Vincent Cassel
Eric Névé
Screenplay/Dialogue
Romain Gavras
Karim Boukercha
Director of Photography
André Chénedoff
Editor
Benjamin Weil
Art Director
Christian Vallat
Original Music
Sebastian
Sound
Erwan Kerzanet
Jérôme Gonthier
Marco Casanova
Marc Doisne
Costumes
Nathalie Benros

©120 Films, Les
Chauves-Souris, TF1
Droits Audiovisuels
Production Companies
120 Films and Les
Chauves-Souris present
in co-production with
TF1 Droits Audiovisuels
in association with
Sofica Cinéma 4 with
the participation of
Canal+, CinéCinéma,
CRRV Nord-Pas de
Calais, Centre national
du cinéma et de l'image
animée a film by
Romain Gavras
A 120 Films, Les
Chauves-Souris, TF1
Droits Audiovisuels
co-production in
association with Sofica
Cinéma 4 with the
participation of Canal+,
CinéCinéma, CRRV
Nord-Pas de Calais with
the support of Région
Nord-Pas de Calais in
partnership with CNC -
Centre national du
cinéma et de l'image
animée

CAST

Vincent Cassel
Patrick
Olivier Barthélemy
Rémy
Justine Leroy
Natacha
Charlotte Decat
Vaness

Boris 'Byron'
Gamthety
Serge
Rodolphe Blanchet
Joël
Chloé Catoen
little Russian girl
Sylvain Le Minez
hostage
Pierre Boulanger
receptionist
Mathilde Braure
Rémy's mother
Thomas Pinczak
fat man
Jacques Herlin
Hervé Clavel
Jérôme Mazure
Gaelle

Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Optimum Releasing

French theatrical title
Our Day Will Come

Not submitted for
theatrical classification
Video certificate: 18
Running time: 83m 12s



Confusion in his eyes: Liam Boyle

Powder

United Kingdom 2010

Director: Mark Elliott

"What's up superstar?" asks squeeze Hannah (Vinette Robinson) as troubled indie-rock frontman Keva (Liam Boyle) sits moping on a jetty in Ibiza. Well she might ask: Keva and his band The Grams have hit the big time – their single is being played on the radio, they've scored a recording contract, they're playing festivals. But Keva is unable to enjoy his newfound stardom, experiencing flashbacks to his abusive stepfather burning his childhood guitar. Hence he's come to Ibiza, in the hope that smoking some joints with a dreadlocked mystic from his past might ease his psyche.

Though *Powder* is based on a novel by Kevin Sampson, former manager of early 1990s Liverpool band The Farm,

there's not a glimmer of authenticity or insight in this account of a band's rise to stardom. Instead, clichés of music-industry excess abound, and the film comes close to pantomime in its boo-hissable villain Helmet (Al Weaver), a Draculian rival pop star who stole one of Keva's early songs, envies The Grams' success, and – in the film's deplorable final moments – is blackmailed into admitting on videotape that he's "not cool". Yet even Weaver's campy performance is preferable to Boyle's benumbed, one-note portrayal of Keva, in which the character's trauma manifests itself as a series of interminable blank stares into space.

Directed by Mark Elliott (who was editor on *Awaydays*, Red Union Films' 2008 Kevin Sampson adaptation), *Powder* feels dated on arrival, its weepy lad-rock anthems and scenes of Balearic bacchanalia reminiscent of a project that Danny Boyle might have turned down in the mid-90s.

➡ **Samuel Wigley**

CREDITS

Produced by
David A. Hughes
Adapted from his novel by
Kevin Sampson
Director of Photography
Mark Waters
Editor
Mark Elliott
Production Designer
Malcolm Smith
Original Score
David A. Hughes
Sound Recordist
Jimmy Mulhearn
Costume Designer
Nicky Barron Orange

©Red Union Films
Limited
Production Company
Red Union Films present
Executive Producers
Kevin Sampson
David Moores Jr
Simon Moran

CAST

Liam Boyle
Keva McCluskey
Alfie Allen
Wheez
Stephen Martin
Walters
Johnny Winegums

Al Weaver
Helmet
Tim Dantay
Tad Brill
Vinette Robinson
Hannah
Jo Woodcock
Ticky
Oliver Lee
James Love
Jefferson Hall
Guy
Ralf Little
Syd
Aneurin Barnard
Miguel
Neil Bell
Billy Tidy

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Distributor
Soda Pictures

SYNOPSIS A small industrial town in France, the present. A young man called Rémy is bullied in his community because of his red hair. Patrick is a demotivated psychiatrist, also red-haired. When Rémy attacks his mother and sister, neither of whom care much about him, Patrick is called in to treat him; instead Patrick accompanies Rémy to meet Gaëlle, a girlfriend, in a cyber-café. It transpires that Gaëlle is in fact a man, so Rémy is mocked for being gay by everyone in the café, including Patrick.

Patrick decides to teach Rémy to stand up for himself. After starting a fight with some Arabs, he pairs Rémy up with various girls, which boosts Rémy's confidence. Rémy sees an advertisement about Ireland, showing a red-haired family, and realises it's his dreamland. Rémy and Patrick decide to go there. With newfound confidence, Rémy buys himself clothes and a crossbow. Rémy and Patrick's drive to the ferry becomes a rampage of escalating indiscriminate violence. During a stay at a hotel, they shave their hair and eyebrows. Rémy confirms he isn't gay by kissing a man and remaining unaroused. They steal a car but leave it behind when they're unable to pay a toll and start walking. Rémy is shot in crossfire when they steal a van from some local workers. When they miss the ferry, Patrick drives towards a balloon about to launch. They force the occupants out, get in and fly away.

SYNOPSIS Liverpool, the present. Keva McCluskey, talented but tormented singer with indie-rock band The Grams, is demoralised when Helmet Horrocks, frontman of former support act The Transbad Saints, steals one of his songs and makes a hit out of it.

The Grams are signed to a record label. Despite Helmet's interference, their songs are soon getting airplay. Keva struggles to appreciate his rising fame or to commit to further recordings, as he's haunted by past abuse at the hands of his stepfather. He tells his manager and bandmates that he thinks he can exorcise his demons if they travel to Ibiza in search of a childhood friend.

While the rest of the group party on the island, Keva resists the increasing affections of Hannah, a member of their coterie. A barmaid helps him find his friend, now a Rastafarian camping out on the island; Keva spends the night opening up to him about his past. He returns to England, and confronts his stepfather.

Keva gives an interview to Johnny Winegums, a journalist friend, about his past, subsequently turning down Johnny's advances. As an act of love for Keva, Johnny blackmails Helmet with some embarrassing TV footage from his past and forces him to admit on film that he's "not cool".

Hannah and Keva come together and The Grams play a triumphant show at the V Festival.

Project Nim

United Kingdom 2011

Director: James Marsh

Certificate 12A 99m 29s

In Kafka's 1919 tale 'A Report to an Academy', an ape named Red Peter recounts how he came to drink, smoke, walk and talk like a man. The story makes it ironically clear that such achievements are a mixed blessing, and Red Peter's acquisition of human language leaves him unable to speak about his primate past. It's no great evolutionary leap from Kafka's monkey to the titular chimp of *Project Nim*. Taken from his mother as a baby, Nim was raised among humans for the first five years of his life in an experiment to see if he could communicate with language.

James Marsh's documentary charts the experiment, from its beginnings in 1973 under Columbia University psychology professor Herbert Terrace up to Nim's death 26 years later. *Wisconsin Death Trip* (1999) and the Oscar-winning *Man on Wire* (2008) have established Marsh as an adroit narrative documentarist with an eye for reverberant historical subjects. Often adapted from books – in this case, Elizabeth Hess's *Nim Chimsky: The Chimp Who Would Be Human* (2007) – his films juxtapose past and present, setting extensive archive material against contemporary interviews. So it is with *Project Nim*, in which the human participants recall the experiment more than 30 years later.

In *Man on Wire*, Marsh allowed the charismatic wire-walker Philippe Petit to carry the story. It was only afterwards that I found myself asking questions – where did the money for Petit's traversal of the Twin Towers come from, for example? The careful skirting of such details is the work of skilful storytelling, especially if one considers how Marsh also makes us overlook the fact that only photographs of the stunt exist, whereas Petit's previous daredevilry had been extensively filmed. A similar narrative sleight of hand is at work in *Project Nim*. Terrace's experiment aimed to examine whether a chimp raised among humans could acquire sufficient sign language for extensive inter-species communication; Marsh is more interested in it as an alibi for a surrogate family drama. So we're persuaded to overlook details relating to language – for example, none of the participants refers to the chimp by his full name, Nim Chimsky, which is only seen in a fleeting shot of a newspaper headline. Thus Marsh avoids having to unpack the name as a gag on the linguistics professor Noam Chomsky, who contends that, unlike animals, humans are hardwired for language.

Downplaying its scientific substance, Marsh amplifies the experiment's inescapable anthropomorphism. Clad in nappies and T-shirt, Nim capers through an upscale Manhattan brownstone and the grounds of a mansion, bringing out the emotional and professional power-play of the



I wanna be like you: Nim Chimsky, Laura-Ann Petitto

humans involved. Terrace emerges as manipulative and disillusioned, dismissing Nim's language as little more than advanced begging. Marsh tellingly relates Nim's fortunes to the fag-end flower-child mores of his carers. In this regard, the devoted Grateful Dead fan Bob Ingersoll emerges sympathetically, saving Nim from a lonely fate after the experiment is abandoned, as well as revealing that, like his fictional precursor Red Peter, Nim was not averse to the pleasures of drinking beer and puffing on the occasional joint.

Project Nim is a valuable insight into the current state of the

anthropomorphic imagination. And it's certainly of the cultural moment, if one considers other recent examples such as James Lever's satirical star 'autobiography' *Me Cheeta* (2008), Nicolas Philibert's orangutan documentary *Nénette* (2010), the Young Vic's production of Colin Teevan's play *Kafka's Monkey*, and the ongoing 'Animal Turn' in academia. Evidently we're still scratching the same itch of human heredity that Red Peter described almost a hundred years ago: "Everyone who walks the earth feels this little tickle at his heel: from the little chimpanzee to the great Achilles."

Chris Darke

CREDITS

Produced by
Simon Chinn
Based on the book
Nim Chimsky: The Chimp Who Would Be Human by Elizabeth Hess
Director of Photography
Michael Simmonds
Film Editor
Jinx Godfrey
Production Designer
Re-enactment Unit
Markus Kirschner
Original Music
Dickon Hinchcliffe
Costume Designer

Re-enactment Unit
Kathryn Nixon
Sound Recordists
Documentary Unit
Steven Robinson
Peter Miller

©Project Nim Ltd/UK Film Council
Production Companies
A Red Box Films production in association with Passion Pictures for BBC and the UK Film Council
Developed with the assistance of BBC Films
Made with the support of the UK Film Council's

New Cinema Fund and Development Fund
Executive Producers
John Battsek
Andrew Ruhemann
Jamie Laursen
Nick Fraser
Hugo Grumbar

CAST

Re-enactment Unit
Bern Cohen
Dr Lemmon
Reagan Leonard
Stephanie LaFarge
Anna May Marsh
signing girl
Michael LePera MD
W.E.R. LaFarge

Sarah Sakaan
Renee Falitz
Dennis Lauricella
Robert J. Nesi
beefy guys

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Icon Film Distribution

8,953 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS November 1973, Oklahoma. An infant male chimpanzee is taken from his mother and removed to Manhattan, to be raised by the family of a female psychology student participating in an experiment in animal language acquisition. The chimp, nicknamed 'Nim', is dressed, toilet-trained, fed at the family table, and proves adept at acquiring sign language. However, tensions emerge in the family as Nim becomes increasingly disruptive.

Nim is taken to a 24-acre estate in New York, where his often dangerous behaviour challenges the young female students who act as his carers. The experiment is halted in September 1977. Nim is returned to the Oklahoma research facility where he was born, and he befriends the human staff. In 1982, the facility runs out of funds and Nim is sold into medical research.

Members of Nim's surrogate 'family' act to reverse the chimp's fortunes, attracting the interest of a maverick lawyer. Nim is bought by a self-publicising animal-rights activist and taken to live alone in an animal sanctuary in Texas, from which he is eventually retrieved by one of his former carers. Nim lives among other chimps until his death in 2000.

The Referees

Belgium 2009

Directors: Yves Hinant, Delphine Lehericéy, Eric Cardot

Few professionals can invite such public abuse and media scrutiny as international football referees, routinely barracked by thousands of spectators and verbally abused by players and managers, their instantaneous judgements retrospectively pored over from countless camera angles by a gallery of pundits. Back in 2005, one of Europe's top officials, Sweden's Anders Frisk, retired in the face of online death threats from Chelsea fans. In *The Referees* (whose working title was, incidentally, *Kill the Referee*) England's Howard Webb arouses Polish fury by granting a late penalty to opponents Austria, leading Polish prime minister Donald Tusk to declare publicly that he is "ready to kill" Webb, who is mocked up to resemble Hitler on a YouTube posting. Police patrols have to be deployed back in Yorkshire to protect Webb's relatives from possible reprisals.

The genesis of this documentary lies in an approach made by the head of the UEFA refereeing committee Yvan Cornu to the Belgian filmmaker Yves Hinant, who was allowed full access to the referees at the 2008 European Championship Finals. However the result is far from a blandly corporate PR exercise: Hinant and his co-directors Eric Cardot and Delphine Lehericéy have crafted a deceptively revealing film which challenges our preconceptions of the men in the middle. Its most interesting formal device is the use of microphones, which allow us to listen in on the frenzied conversations between the refs and their assistants during the games. In these clips we can appreciate the sheer speed of events on the pitch, and how the officials work as a team in making split-second decisions. Switzerland's Massimo Busacca apologises to a Greek player following the final whistle, freely admitting his fallibility: "I am not God. We also make mistakes."

The Referees eschews voiceover commentary and interviews, allowing its intimate yet unobtrusive approach to capture the feelings and emotions experienced by its subjects. We sense the tension in the dressing room in the minutes leading up to kickoff; we witness the worry etched on Webb's assistant's face at half-time over not flagging for offside in the build-up to a goal; we share in their relief when a game ends without a refereeing controversy – doing your job well in this context means going unnoticed. In this predominantly masculine universe – women are glimpsed only in the role of mother/wife/girlfriend – back-slapping hugs are frequently exchanged, while Italy's Roberto Rosetti and his team kiss one another on the cheek before taking to the pitch.

Over the course of the film's trim 77 minutes it becomes clear how much these men want to be selected to referee the final: their competition

← isn't between nations but between themselves, and they fear that a high-profile error could lead to an early exit. Interestingly, they themselves are treated in an almost childlike way by their superiors: they attend briefings at which their work is 'marked', and they receive handshakes and going-home prizes when they are released from the tournament. Rosetti is shrewdly perceptive about his status in a sport that is the subject of such inexhaustible media coverage: "It doesn't matter what happens. What we see doesn't count. What matters is what they say about what we saw." Here's hoping that *The Referees* goes at least some way to redressing that imbalance in perspective. **Thomas Dawson**

CREDITS

A film by
Yves Hinant
Jean Libon
Based on an idea by
Yves Cornu
Editor
Françoise Tourmen
Art Director
Josh Norton
Sound Designer
Erlin Velberg

©UEFA
Production Company
Entre Chien et Loup
Executive Producer
Michel Vallier

González
Roberto Rosetti
Michel Platini
Peter Fröjdeldt
Massimo Busacca
Pierluigi Collina

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Soda Pictures

Belgian theatrical title
Les Arbitres

WITH

Howard Webb
Manuel Mejuto



Fair game: Howard Webb

SYNOPSIS A fly-on-the-wall documentary following various football referees and their assistants at the European Championship finals, held in Austria and Switzerland during the summer of 2008. Among those featured are England's Howard Webb, Italy's Roberto Rosetti, Switzerland's Massimo Busacca, Spain's Manuel Mejuto González and Sweden's Peter Fröjdeldt. We see the officials preparing for games, refereeing matches and attending debriefing sessions and press conferences. As the tournament progresses, UEFA representatives have to decide which of the referees will officiate at the semi-finals and the final itself, and who will go home early.



Roman conquest: Laura Squizzato, Gianni Di Gregorio, Silvia Squizzato

The Salt of Life

Italy 2011

Director: Gianni Di Gregorio

Certificate 12A **89m** 24s

Crime pays, no doubt. Gianni Di Gregorio made his fortune writing about it. Thanks to his co-scriptwriting of 2008's award-winning Mafia film *Gomorra*, he found himself with enough money and fame to produce and direct a project that he'd been offering to Italian producers for a decade. The result was *Mid-August Lunch*, a great comedy about an ageing unemployed mummy's boy forced to organise a lunch for his mother and her friends, all happily in their nineties. No surprise producers hadn't been flocking in with open cheque books. However, Di Gregorio proved everybody wrong: the film touched unexplored depths in screening the uneventful life of pensioners and decrepit old women. Strictly speaking, *The Salt of Life* is not its sequel but it is born out of a similar formula. Di Gregorio still lends his age-scarred face and obliging smile to the protagonist, only this time his character is married and divides his life between his small family and a demanding old mother. The latter is once again played by charismatic 95-year-old Valeria de Franciscis Bondoni.

Comedy is too strong a word for this film. It is a gentle and heartwarming ironic chronicle of life in the slow lane. We smile at the quiet desperation of Gianni and his goofy attempts to find himself a lover, but at the same time we're moved by the noble dignity with which he suffers his continuous defeats in the face of youth, beauty and money. Di Gregorio's secret lies in his capacity to create empathy along with a respectful smile. He is also a skilled director. Nobody wants to exhume the skeleton of French critic André Bazin and his famous definition of neorealism as "the perfect illusion of reality". And yet the temptation is there, since what Di Gregorio achieves on the cinematic

front is somehow served well by that definition. The lack of memorable shots in *The Salt of Life* is the result of unobtrusive cinematography and camerawork; another telltale sign is the fact that all the actors give their real name to the character they impersonate. Even their casting, as Di Gregorio has explained, was linked to the fact that their real life is not too different from the one they act out on the screen. This isn't necessarily an added value to a film but in this case it's further proof of Di Gregorio's intention to fly low, only a few feet above the ground of 'the real world'. The only exception is in the final daydream sequence in which Gianni imagines himself as a successful lover, in which the *mise en scène* come alive in striking TV-advert colourful images.

But that's only the reality of Gianni's illusion. The rest is a brilliant homage to grey skies, grey hairs and an ironic smile in the face of one's own mortality.

If one vividly remembers Marcello, the handsome protagonist of Federico Fellini's *La dolce vita* or Guido in *8½* (both played by Marcello Mastroianni), one could think of Gianni as their older brother. The fascination and urge for female beauty, objectified in maternal looks and copious breasts, bear the mark of the old maestro. The Gianni of *The Salt of Life* never enjoyed the glamorous life of his younger brothers, and now he has to come to terms with his own senility. Add voyeurism as the only sexual activity left, and we are served with the stuff of real tragedy - not epic, but oh so real.

Guido Bonsaver

CREDITS

Produced by
Angelo Barbagallo
Screenplay
Gianni Di Gregorio
Valerio Altanasio
Story
Gianni Di Gregorio
Director of Photography
Gogò Bianchi
Editor
Marco Spoletini
Art Director
Susanna Cascella
Music
Ratchev & Carratello
Production Sound Mixer
Gianluca Costamagna
Costume Designer
Silvia Polidori

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Productions
Production Companies
BiBi Film, Isaria
Productions, RAI
Cinema present a BiBi Film, Isaria Productions
production in
collaboration with RAI
Cinema
Made with tax breaks
from Ministero per i Beni
e le Attività Culturali
(MiBAC) through Ariete
S.p.A., Finpiave S.p.A.,
General Service S.p.A.
Executive Producer
Gaetano Daniele

CAST

Gianni Di Gregorio
Gianni
Valeria De Franciscis Bondoni
Gianni's mother
Alfonso Santagata
Alfonso
Elisabetta Piccolomini
Gianni's wife
Valeria Cavalli
Valeria
Aylin Prandi
Aylin
Kristina Cepraga
Kristina
Michelangelo Ciminale
Michelangelo
Teresa Di Gregorio
Teresa
Lilia Silvi
Lilia

Gabriella Sborgi
Gabriella
Laura Squizzato
Silvia Squizzato
twins

Dolby Digital
In Colour
Prints by
Technicolor
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Artificial Eye Film
Company

8,046 ft +0 frames

Italian theatrical title
Gianni e le donne

SYNOPSIS Rome, the present. Gianni is a pensioner who divides his time between his family - which comprises his busy working wife, his teenage daughter and her boyfriend, and a small dog - and looking after his ageing mother. After a failed attempt to dupe his mother into signing a legal document giving him the right to sell her house, Gianni is persuaded by a friend to find himself a lover. At first Gianni tries to court the young nurse caring for his mother, but gives up after she confesses to him that she dreamt of him as her grandfather. After spending time and money on his looks and fitness, Gianni goes out with his friend on an expensive double date with identical twins, visits an old family friend and contacts an old girlfriend who falls asleep during their meeting. He also regularly walks the dog of a beautiful young neighbour.

On the evening of her mother's birthday, Gianni takes the neighbour's dog for a walk, wanders aimlessly during the night and is found the following morning by his daughter's boyfriend. On the way home, he imagines being adored by all the women he desires.

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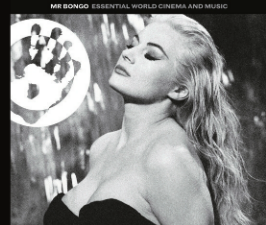
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Martin Scorsese

My Voyage To Italy



Made in 1999, *My Voyage to Italy* was a cultural initiative undertaken by Martin Scorsese as part of his tireless campaign in restoring and preserving the world's greatest films. It serves as an ode and monument to the history of Italian cinema.

"Will forever change and deepen the way you look at cinema"

New York Times

Justin Mitchell

Rio Breaks



Based on a 2004 article by Vince Medeiros for *Surfer's Path* magazine, *Rio Breaks* eschews the conventional sports documentary narrative. It places surfing in relation to what it means to people in their daily lives in Rio.

*"Gentle, touching and beautifully captured, this is the best surfing documentary since *Riding Giants*"*

Total Film

Grigori Kozintsev

King Lear



One of William Shakespeare's darkest works, *King Lear* receives vivid expression in this esteemed Russian rendition. The film's use of widescreen and its stark black-and-white cinematography provide an expansive cinematic dimension to the tragedy.

"A strong contender for the greatest adaptation of Shakespeare's greatest play"

FILM4

Grigori Kozintsev

Hamlet



Kozintsev's renowned Soviet production ranks among the finest adaptations of Shakespeare on film. His strong visual style places the characters on a rich widescreen canvas while preserving the inward dimension of Hamlet's character.

"A spectacle"

New York Times

New music from Mr Bongo

Various Artists - *Psychedelic Pernambuco* (Brazilian Psychedelia) (1960-1970)

Flaviola e o Bando do Sol (Brazilian Psychedelia) (1974)

Tom Zé - *Grande Liquidacao* (Brazilian Tropicalia) (1968)

Sarah's Key

France 2011

Director: Gilles Paquet-Brenner

Certificate 12A 110m Os

More than 70 years after WWII, Holocaust-themed films continue to exercise their fascination over audiences, penetrating even previously no-go areas like children's cinema with *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2008). Yet *Sarah's Key* illustrates how genre fiction and genocide can make for an uneasy mix, even when handled with dexterity and restraint.

Adapted from Tatiana de Rosnay's bestseller, the film's two-time-strand narrative piggybacks the contemporary self-discovery story of Julia, an American journalist resident in Paris, on to the tale of ten-year-old Sarah, desperate to save the small brother she's hidden from the French police when she and her parents are arrested and interned in the 1942 Vélodrome d'Hiver round-up. But director Gilles Paquet-Brenner (previously known outside France only for the unmemorable horror-shlocker *Walled In*) gives the Occupation sequences such vitality and immediacy that the film feels lopsided from the get-go, and its emotional impact is all front-loaded. Handheld camerawork, focusing tightly on the jostling, rumour-swept chaos of the Vélodrome, or on Sarah taking a fear-fuelled train ride back to Paris, contributes a ceaseless feeling of tension and claustrophobia. In one harrowing scene in which the children are literally torn from their mothers at the Beaune transit camp, Paquet-Brenner's camera sites us plumb in the centre of a terrified, hose-drenched stampede. All this combines with the beady, preternaturally determined performance of Mélusine Mayance as Sarah to pull the viewer in most effectively. Flawless period production values and a sombre realism suggest the perhaps inevitable influence of *Schindler's List* (1993), but while the film retains Sarah's point of view, it has an involving style all its own.

The cooler, long-lensed treatment of Julia's parallel search for Sarah's story is far less engrossing, much of it devoted to handwringing over a longed-for pregnancy that threatens her marriage. Kristin Scott Thomas employs her trademark understated delicacy as Julia to keep the melodrama in check, and the supporting cast take their cue from her. The film utilises the same kind of restraint in its even-handed examination of the Tezacs, Julia's in-laws, who have hidden their largely blameless involvement in Sarah's tragedy from their descendants, just as the adult Sarah hides her past from her American child. Paquet-Brenner's treatment of the material is occasionally gauche but never crass. Julia's investigation is used smartly as a means to mull over the still touchy issue of French wartime guilt, and the survivor guilt that eventually destroys Sarah's adult life. For those many viewers unaware that the French state arrested and dispatched Jewish citizens



Unlocking the past: Kristin Scott Thomas

to the camps, it may perform a useful service. Still, the contrast in dramatic temperature between the two story strands makes one's fingers itch for a fast-forward button.

Once Sarah has discovered her brother's body, hidden in what has become the Tezacs' flat, Julia's mission to find out what happened to Sarah becomes the film's sole plot motor, introducing a terminally sentimental note – one that grows increasingly insistent as the film segues into an airport-novel 'emotional journey'

linking the newly liberated Julia with Sarah's son (a lachrymose Aidan Quinn) in a dawdling, globetrotting search for closure. What the film never solves is the slightly queasy question of why we should need Julia's quivering self-discovery as our conduit into Sarah's story. It gives her first-world problems a thoughtless and solipsistic parity with Sarah's plight, one that belies the historical importance of the events she symbolises even as it seeks to keep them in our memories.

◆◆ Kate Stables

CREDITS

Produced by
Stéphane Marsil
Screenplay,
Adaptation and
Dialogue by
Serge Joncour
Gilles Paquet-Brenner
Based on the novel *Elle s'appelait Sarah* by
Tatiana de Rosnay
Director of
Photography
Pascal Ridao
Editing
Hervé Schneid
Art Director
Françoise Dupertuis
Original Music
Composed,
Conducted and
Orchestrated by
Max Richter

Sound
Didier Codoul
Bruno Seznec
Alexandre Fleurant
Fabien Devillers
Costume Designer
Eric Perron

©Hugo Productions,
Studio 37, TFI Droits
Audiovisuels, France 2
Cinéma
Production
Companies
Stéphane Marsil
presents a
co-production of Hugo
Productions, Studio 37
& TFI Droits
Audiovisuels, France 2
Cinéma
With the participation of
Canal+, TPS Star,

France Télévisions
With the support of
Région Île-de-France
In association with
Sofica A Plus Image

CAST

Kristin Scott Thomas
Julia Jammond
Mélusine Mayance
Sarah Starzynski
Niels Arestrup
Jules Dufauré
Frédéric Pierrot
Bertrand Tezac
Michel Duchaussoy
Edouard Tezac
Dominique Frot
Geneviève Dufauré
Natasha Mashkevich
Madame Starzynski
Gisèle Casadesus
Mamié

Aidan Quinn
William Rainford
Sarah Ber
Rachel
Arben Bajraktaraj
Monsieur Starzynski
Karina Hin
Zoé Tezac

Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Optimum Releasing

9,900 ft +0 frames

French theatrical title
Elle s'appelait Sarah

The Skin I Live In

Spain/USA 2011

Director: Pedro Almodóvar

Certificate 15 120m 19s

This review reveals a major plot twist.

Pedro Almodóvar's lengthy presskit notes on *The Skin I Live In* discuss many aspects of the film. He first thought, he says, of adapting Thierry Jonquet's novel *Tarantula* as a silent, monochrome movie in the manner of early Lang or Murnau. He mulls over the story's resonances: the notion of the prisoner as Elias Canetti's *Enemy of Death*, the notion of a *madre muerte* giving birth to two amoral, deranged sons with different fathers but intertwined fatal destinies, the implications of living in a surveillance culture, the notion of skin as a signifier of identity, the echoes of Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* and Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (and Mary Shelley's – though not James Whale's – *Frankenstein*), and on and on. The one thing this weighty self-exegesis fails to address is the problem of a story with no emotional core, and consequently virtually no emotional kick.

The Skin I Live In follows other recent Almodóvar's melodramas – everything at least since *Bad Education* (2004) – in using a restrained, unassertive visual style to tell a more or less outrageous story. Almodóvar sets this one very slightly in the future, but its lineaments are all redolent of last century's horror movies. Like Dr Moreau, plastic surgeon Robert Ledgard (Antonio Banderas, encouraged by his director to echo Alain Delon's blankness in Melville movies) is experimenting with illegal transgenics, fusing human and animal genes to create a new and more resilient skin. Like any number of mad scientists, not to mention 'Scottie' Ferguson in *Vertigo*, his ulterior motivation is to recreate the image of a loved one he has lost – in this case his wife Gal, who killed herself after suffering disfiguring burns. And like countless mad avengers before him, he's also driven by a ruthless vigilante desire to exact revenge on the young man who raped his mentally fragile daughter, driving her to suicide. The 'outrageous' twist (it's also outrageously improbable) is that he combines the two illicit impulses by kidnapping the supposed rapist, imprisoning him, subjecting him to a series of gender-reassignment operations... and then gradually turning the transsexual woman into a reproduction of his lost love. How the sadistic desire for revenge merges with the masochistic desire for a lost love-object is not explained. His willing accomplice in this project is his doting mother Marilia (Marisa Paredes), and his nemesis is his animalistic half-brother Zeca, who returns like the repressed dressed in a carnival tiger costume to wreak havoc. Needless to say, all of this occurs in an isolated country mansion, tricked out with Mabuse-like security and surveillance devices.

There are only two decisive events: the arrival of Zeca in the household and

SYNOPSIS Paris, 1942. Ten-year-old Sarah Starzynski hides her small brother Michel in a cupboard when police arrive to take her family to the Vélodrome d'Hiver with 13,000 other Jews.

In 2002, journalist Julia is writing an article on the Vel d'Hiv round-up. She discovers that her husband's family apartment in Paris once belonged to the Starzynski family, and was acquired the month after they vanished. She is pregnant, which horrifies her ambitious husband.

In 1942, determined to rescue Michel, Sarah escapes her transit camp and finally gets to Paris, helped by a village couple, Jules and Geneviève Dufauré. She finds Michel's body in the cupboard.

Julia's father-in-law has hidden this incident for 60 years, his family having initially paid for Sarah to live with the Dufaurés. Julia tries to trace Sarah, and unearths her 1955 marriage in America. Julia refuses an abortion, leaves her husband and tracks Sarah's American family to Brooklyn. She learns that Sarah died in 1966 in a (possibly deliberate) car accident, leaving a son, William. Julia visits William in Italy, where he flatly rejects her story. William's ailing father confirms Sarah's hidden past and suicide to his son.

In 2004, Sarah and William meet in New York. He thanks her for unearthing his mother's story and is moved by her toddler's name – Sarah.



Come flay with me: Antonio Banderas

his brutal rape of the transsexual Vera is the main one (it's the story's turning point, marking the beginning of the end), and the flashback depiction of the near-rape of Ledgard's daughter Norma by Vicente (a virginal young man evidently screwed up by his attraction to the lesbian Cristina, who works in his mother's shop) is the other. The rest of the film is less interested in storytelling

CREDITS

Produced by
Esther García
Producer
Agustín Almodóvar
Screenplay
Pedro Almodóvar
With the collaboration of
Agustín Almodóvar
Based on the novel
Mygale [Tarantula] by
Thierry Jonquet
Director of
Photography
José Luis Alcaine
Editing
José Salcedo
Art Director
Antón Gómez
Music
Alberto Iglesias
Costume Designer
Paco Delgado

Costumes
Collaborator
Jean-Paul Gaultier
Sound Recorder
Iván Marín

©El Deseo
Production
Companies
El Deseo presents a film
by Almodóvar
In association with Blue
Lake Entertainment,
FilmNation
Entertainment
With the support of
Instituto de
Cinematografía y de las
Artes Audiovisuales
Supported by the
Instituto de Crédito
Oficial
With the participation of
TVE and Canal+

as such than in 'normalising' the bizarre characters and their actions by showing only their everyday routines. The general anonymity of the images – the visual blandness, the minimising of expressive compositions – enhances this 'normalising' process.

Almodóvar's latter-day rejection of his early, florid style has often looked like an attempt to reproduce classical Hollywood film language, but here the avowed inspiration is Luis Buñuel. (The opening panorama of Toledo quotes a near-identical shot at the start of *Tristana*.) Buñuel used an 'anonymous' film language to explore well-defined fetishes and phobias, but the narrative here is far too complicated, and far too loaded with backstory, to yield clear pictures of anything. Not Ledgard's mania, not Vera's suffering, not Marilia's sinister complicity, not even Norma's fragile vulnerability. There's too much going on, a lot of it between scenes or beneath the surface, and hardly any of it comes into clear emotional focus.

The DNA spirals under the closing credits, the breathless poignancy of the closing scene (in which Vicente starts to explain to his mother and the now-interested Cristina that he is now Vera), and the earlier insistence on spelling out the problems male-to-female transsexuals have in adjusting to hetero-sex with complete and clinical accuracy all suggest a core concern with identity: human, individual and sexual. It's a pity the film as a whole loses sight of those issues in its determination to normalise the abnormal. Some directors thrive on such restraint. Almodóvar ain't one of them. **Tony Rayns**

España, Xacobeo
Galicia, X Quijote/
Castilla-La Mancha

CAST

Antonio Banderas
Dr Robert Ledgard
Elena Anaya
Vera
Marisa Paredes
Marilia, the
housekeeper
Jan Cornet
Vicente
Roberto Álamo
Zeca
Eduard Fernández
Fulgencio
José Luis Gómez
cast member
Blanca Suárez
Norma, Robert's
daughter

Susi Sánchez
Bárbara Lennie
Fernando Cayo

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Pathé Distribution

10,828 ft +8 frames

Spanish theatrical title
La piel que habito

Super 8

USA 2011

Director: J.J. Abrams

Certificate 12A 111m 0s

At the end of her essay 'Film and the Radical Aspiration', published in the autumn of 1966, at the time of the first seasons of *Mission: Impossible* and *Star Trek*, Annette Michelson wrote that, "Within the structure of our culture, ten-year-olds are now filming 8mm serials – mostly science fiction, I am told – in their own backyards. This, perhaps, is the single most interesting fact about cinema. Given this new accessibility of the medium, anything can happen." Steven Spielberg, who had been one of those kids, was then 19; J.J. Abrams, who would become one, had just been born. Among all the interesting things that could have happened, Abrams – whose backyard efforts owed a debt to the maker of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), and who was once entrusted with the job of restoring Spielberg's teenage reels – went on to direct the third (and best) *Mission: Impossible* movie before rebooting the *Star Trek* franchise. Then he made *Super 8*, a Spielberg pastiche of uncanny precision and sublime pointlessness.

Just as Tarantino's *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (2003) began with the old Shaw Brothers logo, so *Super 8* begins with the Amblin Entertainment title-card familiar from Abrams's obvious models, *E.T.* (1982) and *The Goonies* (1985) – but this is no in-joke. *Super 8* really is an Amblin picture; Spielberg, credited as a producer, has given it his blessing. An avatar of what music critic Simon Reynolds calls 'retromania', Abrams knows his sources so well that, at least on this showing, he has almost nothing of his own to bring to the table.

What makes the case all the more strange is that as producer on the excellent *Cloverfield* (2007), Abrams helped to introduce a new monster-movie aesthetic using 'prosumer' digital video. *Super 8* looked set to be both a prequel in narrative terms and a backwards development of the earlier film's style into analogue home-movie

format; but by adopting his mentor's visual repertoire, Abrams seems perversely to have forsworn the opportunity to start his own franchise.

This alien, a test subject for the US military, just wants to go home; but unlike E.T. it's not afraid to break a few heads to get there. When it escapes by way of a train crash caused by one of its human sympathisers outside a small town in Ohio, its captors descend on the area, in pursuit also of any witnesses. These include a gang of teenage amateur filmmakers, whose camera has caught a glimpse of the beast before its disappearance and who eventually run it to ground having learnt that, despite all the killing and kidnapping, it has a heart of schmaltz. Unlike the run of 'just in time' summer blockbusters, *Super 8* is an immaculate production, and set-piece scenes, such as the derailment and a later attack by the alien on a military vehicle, are first rate. The growing mystery around the creature, cause of disappearing dogs and motor engines and people, is effective even if the device of leaving it unseen till late in the film, as in *Jaws* (1975), is palpably contrived and self-conscious.

Appearing alongside Michael Bay's militaristic *Transformers* films (also produced by Spielberg), *Super 8*, in which the US Air Force, led by a paradoxically sinister Noah Emmerich, is the real villain, provides a timely reminder that mainstream entertainment movies needn't wave the flag; and there are a few other hints that Abrams, who was a writer on Bay's *Armageddon* (1998), intends a critique of the popcorn status quo. The teenage filmmakers learn from their leading lady Alice (Elle Fanning), in the film's one outstanding moment, that it isn't enough to provide thrills, that movies work better if the audience cares about the characters. To the same end Abrams offers up a substantial subplot about bereavement, guilt and family breakdown, all magically resolved by the alien's departure, and like everything else in the picture strongly reminiscent of Spielberg. Perhaps unconsciously, *Super 8* winds up extolling rote manipulation over smash-bang boredom.

Henry K. Miller



Star jaws: Riley Griffiths, Joel Courtney, Gabriel Basso, Zach Mills, Elle Fanning

SYNOPSIS Toledo, 2012. Plastic surgeon Robert Ledgard posits the illegal idea of a transgenic skin (fusing human and pig genes) which will resist insect bites. Unbeknown to his colleagues, he has already developed it and is testing it on Vera, a young woman he holds captive in his mansion El Cigaral outside the city. Vera has several times self-harmed; her daily needs are met by Robert's mother Marilia, who communicates with her via intercom and a dumb waiter. One day Robert's crazy half-brother Zeca shows up at El Cigaral; struck by Vera's resemblance to Robert's late wife he breaks into her room and rapes her, but Robert returns and shoots him. Robert consoles Vera and they almost make love.

Six years earlier, Robert and his mentally unstable daughter Norma were at a party when Norma was semi-raped by Vicente, who worked in his mother's clothes boutique. Norma killed herself soon after. Robert kidnapped Vicente, prepared him for surgery, tricked his surgical team into carrying out an 'underground' gender reassignment – and turned Vicente into Vera.

Back in the present, Robert releases Vera from her room and tells Marilia to take her shopping. While they are out, Dr Fulgencio threatens to blackmail Robert; he has discovered the truth about Vicente/Vera. On her return, Vera finds both a 'missing person' photograph of Vicente and a gun. She shoots Robert and Marilia and makes her way to her mother's shop to explain that she is Vicente.

CREDITS

Produced by
Steven Spielberg
J.J. Abrams
Bryan Burk
Written by
J.J. Abrams
Director of Photography
Larry Fong
Edited by
Maryann Brandon
Mary Jo Markey
Production Designer
Martin Whist
Music
Michael Giacchino
Sound Designer
Ben Burt
Costume Designer
Ha Nguyen
Visual Effects & Animation
Industrial Light & Magic
Additional Visual Effects
Bad Robot Optical, Inc.

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Production Companies
Paramount Pictures presents an Amblin Entertainment/Bad Robot production
With the participation of the State of California and the California Film Commission
With the assistance of the WV Film Industry Investment Act
Executive Producer
Guy Riedel
Film Extracts
High Diving Hare (1948)

CAST

Kyle Chandler
Deputy Jackson 'Jack' Lamb

Elle Fanning
Alice Dainard
Joel Courtney
Joe Lamb
Gabriel Basso
Martin
Noah Emmerich
Nelec
Ron Eldard
Louis Dainard
Riley Griffiths
Charles Kaznyk
Ryan Lee
Cary
Zach Mills
Preston
Jessica Tuck
Mrs Kaznyk
Joel McKinnon Miller
Mr Kaznyk
AJ Michalka
Jen Kaznyk
Glynn Turman
Dr Woodward

Dolby Digital/DTS/
SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Paramount Pictures UK
9,990 ft +0 frames

The Taqwacores

USA 2011

Director: Eyad Zahra

Certificate 15 83m 20s

Do punk and Islam mix? That's the question posed by *The Taqwacores*, Eyad Zahra's no-budget feature debut. Uptight engineering student Yusef moves into new accommodation in Buffalo, New York, expecting to find a group of earnest, well-mannered young men like himself – but finds he's surrounded by dope-smoking, heavy-drinking, spike-haired skaters who perform their dawn devotions on electric guitar on the rooftop and obsess over the Muslim hardcore punk scene 'Taqwacore'. The most orthodox housemate is the tightly wound Umar, who finds an echo of Islam's laws in the teetotal 'straight-edge' subculture of American hardcore. Rabeya, meanwhile, wears a full burqa but beneath it is probably the most radically permissive of them all.

The Taqwacores doesn't completely resolve this Islam-punk question (not that it needs to). Much of the film's action suggests the two cultures are a fit, after some imaginative adjustments; its ending does not. More crucial is how it asks the question, and this is where Zahra's direction falls somewhat short.

The cast is small, the location work minimal – most scenes are shot in or around the same warehouse-like accommodation – and to a degree this works in the film's favour, heightening the sense of Yusef being drawn into a new, if miniature, self-sufficient world in which Friday afternoon prayers can naturally lead into all-night all-ages punk shows. But *The Taqwacores* is adapted from another low-budget production – a novel of the same name by Michael Muhammed Knight, a convert and punk obsessive who used to distribute photocopied editions of his text after gigs. That kind of grimy fanzine immediacy is one of the things *The Taqwacores* lacks. Competent, earnest but ultimately tame, it just doesn't feel especially punk. You end up longing for Zahra to commit some heinous acts of wantonly in-your-face cinematic or aesthetic vandalism, and have to settle for one, at the very end.

It's not until the final reel that *The Taqwacores* comes close to shocking, when its moral centre, Jehangir, decides to put on a kind of Taqwacore mini-festival at the shared house. The tension between violently intolerant fundamentalism and the housemates' more permissive reading of Islam comes to a head. Spitting was a common feature at gigs in punk's first wave; here it's as much *what* Rabeya spits that matters. This sudden jab of transgressive energy, and its sombre aftermath, make for a strange conclusion, as if to suddenly tear up the polite optimism that has come before. But it's an injection of energy that comes a little too late to raise *The Taqwacores* above the unmemorable. **➡ Sam Davies**

CREDITS

Produced by
Eyad Zahra
Screenplay
Michael Muhammed Knight
Eyad Zahra
Based on the novel by Michael Muhammed Knight
Director of Photography
J.P. Perry
Editor
Josh Rosenfield
Production Designer
Marwan Kamel
Original Score
Omar Fadel
Featuring Music by
The Kominas
Sound
Zach Seivers
J.M. Davey

Production Companies
Strand Releasing, Visit Films and Rumanini
Filmworks present a Rumanini Filmworks production
Executive Producer
David Perse

CAST

Bobby Naderi
Yusef
Noureen Dewulf
Rabeya
Dominic Rains
Jehangir Tabari
Nav Mann
Umar
Volkan Eryaman
Amazing Ayyub
Ian Tran
Fasiq
Tony Yalda
Muzzami
Rasika Mathur
Fatima
Anne Leighton
Lynn
John Charles Meyer
Bilal's Boulder lead singer
Denise George
Dee Dee Ali

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Network Releasing
7,499 ft +14 frames

SYNOPSIS Buffalo, New York State, the present. Engineering student Yusef moves into off-campus accommodation, expecting to find an orthodox Muslim household. He finds instead a group of Muslim punk devotees. Jehangir sports a mohican and performs his dawn prayers on electric guitar from the rooftop. Fasiq and Amazing Ayyub are stoned, hard-drinking skateboarders. Rabeya wears the full burqa, though Yusef is astonished to discover that she has torn from her Koran an ayah concerning women's rights with which she disagrees. Umar is into the teetotal 'straight-edge' subculture; his stricter interpretation of the faith puts him at odds with the other residents. Despite their differences, however, they all gather each week for an unconventional version of Friday prayers.

Yusef is initially closest to Umar but finds himself increasingly drawn into Jehangir's orbit as he questions for the first time the religious tenets of his upbringing. An attraction develops between Yusef and Lynn, a Muslim convert, but Yusef, feeling torn about abandoning his parents' moral code, reacts badly and offends her. Tension rises in the house as Umar loses patience with his permissive housemates. He attacks Amazing Ayyub and throws him out of the house. The arrival of the openly gay Muzzamil from San Francisco exacerbates the situation.

Yusef and Jehangir try to reconcile Umar with Muzzami and Ayyub. Inspired by Muzzami's stories of the Muslim-punk 'Taqwacore' scene on the West Coast, Jehangir decides to put on a gig at their house. Adamant that the event be inclusive, he invites a range of Taqwacore bands, including Bilal's Boulder, who hold violently fundamentalist views. On the night of the gig the atmosphere turns sour; Rabeya spits semen at the Bilal's Boulder singer, and in the melee that follows Jehangir is beaten to death.

Transformers Dark of the Moon

USA 2011

Director: Michael Bay

Certificate 12A 154m 0s

The Michael Bay-Steven Spielberg *Transformers* franchise, based on the Hasbro toys and their 1980s cartoon spinoffs, has managed three relentless instalments which consistently deliver state-of-the-art special effects (this time, inevitably, in 3D) that contrive to be less engaging than the baggiest mutant dinosaur suit ever worn by a Sumo wrestler trampling a scale model of Tokyo. The strangest decision was embedding the selling-point business about feuding races of giant shapeshifting automata in a Disneyish youth comedy. The first film was built around a love triangle between everyman foul-up Shia LaBeouf, his hot girlfriend (Megan Fox, unceremoniously written out and replaced by British underwear model Rosie Huntington-Whiteley here) and his sentient car Bumblebee (a best bud/pet substitute like Herbie, not a temptress love rival like Christine).

It now seems that even Michael Bay found so much fault with 2009's *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*, a big enough hit to make this third instalment mandatory, that he has opted to rein back certain tendencies perceived to have warped that sequel. Though it still seems odd there should be a chunk of *Office Space* imitation devoted to the LaBeouf character's workplace troubles bolted into the first third of *Dark of the Moon*, comedy relief is mostly confined to human guest stars (Ken Jeong, John Malkovich, John Turturro, Frances McDormand – all quite dreadful, for Bay has no comic touch).

A long prologue revealing the secret history of the Apollo programme, which later yokes in the real Buzz Aldrin (who went the same self-fictionalising route in the 2008 children's animated film *Fly Me to the Moon*), delivers frissons as the 1969 crew encounter a crashed spaceship on the dark side of the moon. Amid the wearisome clanking, space-wasting human characters (LaBeouf takes all the knocks in reviews, but at least he's got more presence than Josh Duhamel or Tyrese Gibson) and monotonous robot carnage, Bay stages well-conceived if derivative action licks (some peril in a tilting skyscraper expands on *Spider-Man 3* and *Cloverfield*) and one of the new mechanical monsters – a burrowing giant worm – is an impressive creation (if similar to creatures from *Dune* and *Terminator Salvation*). This time, the approach is tougher – we see anonymous extras vaporised and robots 'bleeding' red coolant when savaged, and LaBeouf has a hated human rival he can duke it out with in the ruins. Patrick Dempsey has to carry the burden of explaining a nonsensical plot as an



Zero gravitas: Shia LaBeouf, Rosie Huntington-Whiteley

evil, car-collecting accountant in league with – but still weirdly surprised by the treachery of – a race happy to call themselves the Decepticons.

There ought to be a way to make a live-action film about giant shapeshifting robots that's either a) fun or b) awesome or preferably c) both. After three tries, it's blatantly evident that Bay can only just about

manage b) long enough to provide the shots needed to cut into a trailer. Indeed, the 'coming attractions' for all three *Transformers* pictures are outstanding, which might well be the reason why – given the low expectations of a Michael Bay film based on toys and cartoons – the films themselves still manage to be disappointing. ➡ **Kim Newman**

CREDITS

Produced by
Lorenzo di Bonaventura
Tom DeSanto
Don Murphy
Ian Bryce
Written by
Ehren Kruger
Based on Hasbro's
Transformers action
figures
Director of
Photography
Amir Mokri
Edited by
Roger Barton
William Goldenberg
Joel Negron
Production Designer
Nigel Phelps
Music
Steve Jablonsky
Sound Mixer
Peter J. Devlin
Costume Designer
Deborah L. Scott
Visual Effects
& Animation

Industrial Light & Magic
Special Visual Effects
and **Digital Animation**
Digital Domain
Visual Effects
Company 3 LA
Stunt Co-ordinator
Ken Bates

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Corporation
Production
Companies
Paramount Pictures
presents in association
with Hasbro a Don
Murphy/Tom DeSanto
production
A di Bonaventura
Pictures production
An Ian Bryce production
A Michael Bay film
With the participation of
the State of California
and the California Film
Commission
Executive Producers
Steven Spielberg
Michael Bay

Brian Goldner
Mark Vahradian

CAST

Shia LaBeouf
Sam Witwicky
Josh Duhamel
Lennox
John Turturro
Simmons
Tyrese Gibson
Epps
Rosie Huntington-Whiteley
Carly
Patrick Dempsey
Dylan
Kevin Dunn
Ron Witwicky
Julie White
Judy Witwicky
Ken Jeong
Jerry Wang
Alan Tudyk
Dutch
Glenn Morshower
General Morshower
Lester Speight

Eddie
John Malkovich
Bruce Brazos
Frances McDormand
Charlotte Mearing
Peter Cullen
voice of Optimus Prime
Hugo Weaving
voice of Megatron
Leonard Nimoy
voice of Sentinel Prime
Dolby Digital/DTS/
SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Paramount Pictures UK

Some screenings
presented in 3D
2D/3D version
154m 0s
13,860 ft +0 frames
IMAX prints
155m 5s
223,330ft

The Tree

France/Australia/Belgium/
Italy/Germany 2010

Director: Julie Bertucelli

Certificate 12A 100m 38s

It's no surprise that grief is irresistible to filmmakers. Like love it's universal, but it feels so much more grown-up than all that schmaltzy boy-meets-girl stuff – and actors adore it because they can emot to their heart's content and/or stand around looking stricken in a series of beautifully composed shots.

So naturally there are some stupendously beautiful moments in Julie Bertucelli's eccentric and thought-provoking contribution to the genre. Based on a novel by Judy Pascoe, the film is set against the hazy, parched landscape of rural Queensland, where the sun beats down relentlessly and the air thrums with life. The director doesn't miss a trick when it comes to lingering over a breathtaking vista or framing a startling detail – such as a toilet full of bright-green frogs, or a house sailing along the horizon on a flatbed truck.

Charlotte Gainsbourg plays Dawn, a young widow struggling so hard to survive her own loss that she can't do much to help her four kids cope with theirs. Her eight-year-old daughter Simone (Morgana Davies) is the main worry: she insists that her dad's spirit lives on in the huge fig tree growing next to their dilapidated house, and has taken to climbing into the canopy at all hours for a chat or a little help with her homework. This tree has always been the children's favourite playground, but as other members of the family, including Dawn, begin to find comfort in Simone's delusion, the thick, protective branches and whispering foliage become freighted with quasi-religious ritual and meaning.

It's here that the film takes a key turn, and an interesting one. Dawn's tentative attempts to make a new life for herself include starting a relationship with her boss George (Marton Csokas), but this seems to disturb the tree and cause it to intervene, sending a branch crashing into Dawn's bedroom and finally attacking the house's foundations with its roots. What had seemed a sweet and harmless fantasy of life after death, or a hippified vision of eternal forces connecting love and nature, comes to look more like a destructive form of extreme nostalgia. Both Dawn's eldest

son Tim (Christian Byers) and George urge Dawn and Simone to move on. "You're needed in the land of the living," Tim snarls at his sister, before pissing, literally, all over her tree.

Like George and Tim, viewers too may feel a strong urge to tell the sorrowing protagonists to snap out of it already. This long, slow film takes its pace from the paralysing sadness at its core, which dangerously allows plenty of time to notice some of its more ridiculous extremes – such as the scene in which Dawn snuggles up with the fallen branch that has crashed into her bed. However, it also leaves room for some lovely performances, particularly from the kids (Davies's liping cuteness is nicely offset by a convincing portrait of monomaniacal obsession, and Byers wrings every ounce of nuance out of a none too generous role) and from Csokas, though Gainsbourg wavers too much between earth mother and doormat to be completely convincing.

And throughout, the tree does its best to upstage them, until its overwhelming aura, pervading both the film and the family's emotional landscape, takes it beyond its function as an emblem of loss and turns it into a symbol of symbolism itself. This seems to be the point of the film: by attempting to exchange her husband's absence for a hulking and immovable presence, Dawn turns imagination from a comfort into a prison that shuts down the possibility of life. To this extent, *The Tree* has a curiously self-sabotaging image at its heart. To break free of the symbolism of the tree would be to leave the golden stillness of this exquisite moment of pure meaning: to break out of the frame and escape from the film itself.

➡ **Lisa Mullen**

CREDITS

Produced by
Yael Fogiel
Sue Taylor
Laetitia Gonzalez
Written by
Julie Bertucelli
Based on a screenplay
by Elizabeth J. Mars
Adapted from the novel
Our Father Who Art in
the Tree by Judy Pascoe
Director of
Photography
Nigel Black
Editor
François Gédigier
Production Designer
Steven Jones-Evans
Original Music/Music
Conducted by/Piano
Grégoire Hetzel
Sound Recordist

Olivier Mauvezin
Costume Designer
Joanna Mae Park

©Les Films du Poisson,
Taylor Media, Screen
Australia, ARTE France
Cinéma, Screen
Queensland, Screen
NSW
Production
Companies
Les Films du Poisson
and Taylor Media
present in association
with Screen Australia in
co-production with
ARTE France Cinéma,
ARD/Degeto and
WDR/ARTE with the
participation of Canal +
and ARTE France in
association with Dorje
Film (Alberto Fanni), Le



Love me tinder: Charlotte Gainsbourg

SYNOPSIS US, 1961. NASA discovers that an alien spacecraft has crashed on the dark side of the moon, and President Kennedy authorises the Apollo programme to investigate.

In 1969, the Apollo 11 crew find the ship, piloted by Sentinel Prime of the planet Cybertron, leader of the Autobots in their battle with the Decepticons, and deactivated while leaving Cybertron carrying a mystery weapon that could turn the tide of the war.

Present day. Having twice aided Autobot Optimus Prime and his faction against the Decepticons on Earth, Sam Witwicky is struggling with ordinary life. His high-earning girlfriend Carly works for tycoon Dylan, who helps Sam get a lowly job at a firm where he comes across a Decepticon plot to murder survivors of the space programme.

When Optimus Prime learns the truth about the moon missions, he retrieves Sentinel Prime, his mentor, from the moon and revives him. Sentinel Prime reveals that the weapon he has created is a vast teleportation system, and that he has done a deal with the Decepticons to ensure the survival of Cybertron at the expense of the Earth. In collaboration with Megatron, leader of the Decepticons, and Dylan, a human traitor, Sentinel Prime activates the teleport system, which threatens to bring Cybertron into Earth's atmosphere. The Autobots and their human allies assail the Decepticon stronghold in downtown Chicago. Sam's team shut off the teleport, while Carly manipulates Megatron into attacking Sentinel Prime. Optimus Prime destroys Megatron again.

Pacte and Memento Films International in co-production with TATFilm in association with Screen Queensland, Screen NSW and Coficup 2 (a fund operated by Backup Films) a film by Julie Bertucelli
A Les Films du Poisson/Taylor Media co-production
Developed with the assistance of ScreenWest and LotteryWest
With the writing support of Centre Images-Région Centre and the support of the MEDIA Programme of the European Union
Financed in association with Fulcrum Media Finance (Sharon Menzie, Barry Sechos), Goalpost Pictures (Rosemary Blight, Ben Grant), Kojo Pictures (Kent Smith)
In co-production with ARTE France Cinéma (Michel Reilhac, Rémi Bura), Arte GEIE (Andreas Schreitmüller), WDR/ARTE (Gebhard Henke, Michael André), and ARD/Degeto (Hans-Wolfgang Jurgan)
With the participation of Canal + (Laurent Hassid) and ARTE France (Jérôme Clément)
In association with Dorje Film (Co-producer Alberto Fanni, Associate Producers Paolo Colombo, Flaminio Zadra), Le Pacte (Jean Labadie) and Memento Films International (Emilie Georges)
In co-production with TATFilm (Christine

Ruppert)
In association with Coficup 2
Produced with the assistance of Screen NSW
Filmed with the assistance of Screen Queensland

CAST

Charlotte Gainsbourg
Dawn
Marton Csokas
George
Morgana Davies
Simone
Christian Byers
Tim
Tom Russell
Lou
Gabriel Gotting
Charlie
Aden Young
Peter
Penne Hackforth-Jones
Mrs Johnson
Gillian Jones
Vonnice
Zoe Boe
Megan Lu
Bob MacKay
Ab
Arthur Dignam
Uncle Jack

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Artificial Eye Film Company

9,057 ft +0 frames

French theatrical title
L'Arbre

Villain

Japan 2010

Director: Sang-il Lee

Certificate 15 139m 48s

Villain is part of that long and venerable tradition in which bent-with-age stoics wonder and sadly shake their heads – how on earth did they unleash such horrors into the world, and how did they get it so very wrong with the younger generation? Adapted from the bestselling novel by Yoshida Shuichi (which has been translated and published by Random House to coincide with the film's release in the UK), *Villain* has garnered awards in Japan, and Fukatsu Eri has been much praised for her performance as the darkly whimsical and deluded salesgirl whisked off her feet by a cop-dodging psychopath. The trouble is that the man Fukatsu plays against – a Japanese pop star, you know the deal – really doesn't have the acting chops to pull off the crucial double-act. Bass player and lead singer for rock band Basking Lite, Tsumabuki Satoshi plays Yuichi, a young man frustrated and bored with his smalltown life near Nagasaki, where he has been raised by his grandmother. Enraged when middle-class town girl Yoshino gives him the brush-off, Yuichi – without entirely meaning to – murders her on a road at night.

There's a desolate feel to the entire film, with the first half a kind of whodunnit and the second a fairly standard number in which the star-crossed couple go on the run from the police. Slowly the villain of the title becomes less obvious; it may start out as Yuichi, but then the victim herself is shown in a deeply unflattering light.

Many of the characters in this film seem half-dead, and those that don't have a sociopathic lack of awareness of others. Fukatsu's forlorn shop assistant Mitsuyo is the only one who comes to life – when she runs off with the obviously dangerous Yuichi she finds an abandon she's never sensed before. By the end, however, she's back in the shop, on her hands and knees turning up hems for low-ranking businessmen buying cheap suits.

Director Sang-il Lee hasn't made a film for four years, and his career has flip-flopped between comedies and attempts at more serious drama – *Hula Girls* (2006) was comedic fluff but earlier work was darker. He doesn't really have a handle on the tone here, and seems to shy away from scenes that may not appeal to a perceived youth demographic. Quite often the older actors – including Emoto Akira as the dead girl's barber dad – steal the scenes. The trouble is that the veterans are running on their own steam, showing up the director's inability to direct the younger actors. The complex editing and flashbacks don't always serve the story either, and seem preoccupied with manipulating the audience.

This a grand-gesture film with a big-bucks feel. It has a polished visual sheen and a musical score by Joe Hisaishi, known for his work on *Hana-Bi* (1997) and *Departures* (2008).

But the acting is inconsistent, it's far too long, and many of the themes and scenarios are clichéd. This film has been made before by greater directors than Lee, and he hasn't stepped up to the mark he's set himself.

➡ **Roger Clarke**

CREDITS

Producers
Nihira Tomoyo
Kawamura Genki
Screenplay
Yoshida Shuichi
Based on his novel
Director of Photography
Kasamatsu Norimichi
Editor
Imai Tsuyoshi
Production Designer
Taneda Yohei
Music
Hisaishi Joe
Costume Designer
Ogawa Kumiiko

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Production Companies
Toho Co. Ltd., Amuse Inc.

Executive Producers
Kitagawa Naoki
Hori Yoshitaka
Miyaji Takahisa
Shimatani Yoshishige
Hattori Yo
Machida Tomoko
Uruma Kazumoto
Hatanaka Tatsuro
Amamiya Toshitake
Kitano Hiroaki
Omura Toshiyasu

CAST

Fukatsu Eri
Magome Mitsuyo
Tsumabuki Satoshi
Shimizu Yuichi
Mitsushima Hikari
Ishibashi Yoshino
Okada Masaki
Masuo Keigo
Kiki Kirin
Emoto Akira

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Third Window Films Limited

12,582 ft +0 frames

Japanese theatrical title
Akunin

CREDITS UPDATE

The review of this film was published in the July issue but unfortunately credits were unavailable at the time of going to press.

Mother's Day

USA/Canada 2010

Certificate 18 112m 14s

CREDITS

Directed by
Darren Lynn Bousman
Produced by
Brett Ratner
Richard Saperstein
Producers
Jay Stern
Brian Witten
Screenplay
Scott Milam
Screen Story
Scott Milam
Based on *Mother's Day* written by Charles Kaufman and Warren Leight, directed by Charles Kaufman
Director of Photography
Joseph White
Edited by
Hunter M. Via
Production Designer
Anthony Ianni
Music
Bobby Johnston
Sound Designer
Jeff Pitts
Costume Designer
Leslie Kavanagh

©Mother's Day Productions, LLC
Production Companies
Lighttower
Entertainment presents in association with Widget Films and Sierra Pictures a Rat Entertainment/Genre Company production
A film by Darren Lynn Bousman
With the participation of the Government of Manitoba, Manitoba Film and Video Production Tax Credits
Executive Producers
Curtis Leopardo
Jonathan Zucker
Jessie Rusu
Andrew Golov
Kyle Bornais
Charles Kaufman
Lloyd Kaufman
Stephen Kessler
Stuart Berton

CAST

Rebecca De Mornay
Mother
Jaime King
Beth
Briana Evigan
Annette
Patrick Flueger
Ike
Warren Kole
Addley
Deborah Ann Wall
Lydia
Frank Grillo
Daniel
Matt O'Leary
Johnny
Jessie Rusu
Melissa
Lyriq Bent
Treshawn
Lisa Marcos
Julie
Tony Nappo
Dave

Kandys McClure
Gina
Shawn Ashmore
George

Dolby Digital
Colour by
DeLuxe
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Optimum Releasing

10,101 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS Rural Queensland, present day. When Peter O'Neill dies suddenly of a heart attack, he leaves behind a grief-stricken widow and four children. For eight-year-old Simone, happiness returns when she climbs the enormous fig tree that overshadows their house and thinks she hears her father's voice. Her conviction that his spirit lives on in the tree begins to affect other members of the family too, including mother Dawn, who takes to climbing the tree at night to be with her husband.

This gives her the strength to go back out in the world. Her new job leads to an affair with her boss George. The tree appears to react to what she's doing; after her first date with George, a dead branch crashes into her bedroom; when the family spends Christmas at the beach with George, they return to find that the tree's drought-stricken roots have attacked the house's foundations. George urges them to cut down the tree, but Simone takes up residence in its branches. George's attempts to force her down show Dawn that she can never love him.

A cyclone finally ends the drought but also destroys both the tree and the house. After planting a cutting where the tree stood, Dawn and the children leave to start a new life.

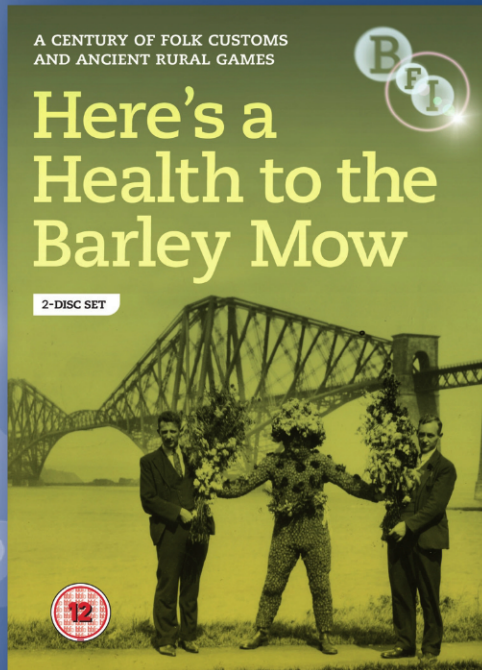
SYNOPSIS Japan, present day.

Twentysomething insurance broker Yoshino has been using an internet dating site to meet blue-collar Nagasaki misfit Yuichi for casual sex. Yuichi is angered when she spurns him for the wealthier Masuo. However, Masuo isn't really interested in Yoshino; driving with her in his car at night, he complains that her breath smells of garlic and callously leaves her on the side of a mountain road. Yuichi, who has been sullenly trailing the couple, murders her after a confrontation. The police initially suspect Masuo of the crime but then focus on Yuichi, who goes on the run with new girlfriend Mitsuyo. Yuichi's grandmother, who raised him after he was abandoned by his mother, has to deal with crowds of journalists outside her house, and at the same time is gulled out of a large sum of money by Chinese medicine dealers. In an effort to understand what has happened, Yoshino's father tracks Masuo down and, outraged by his shallowness and lack of feeling, attacks him ineffectually several times.

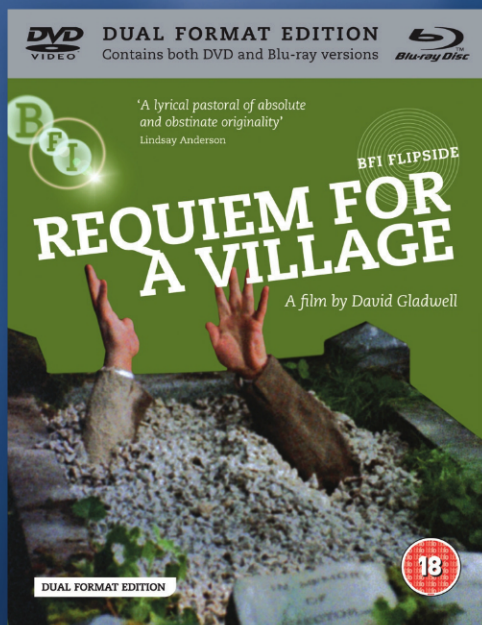
In a final showdown at a lighthouse hideaway, the police break in just as Yuichi tries to strangle Mitsuyo.

THE WAY WE WERE

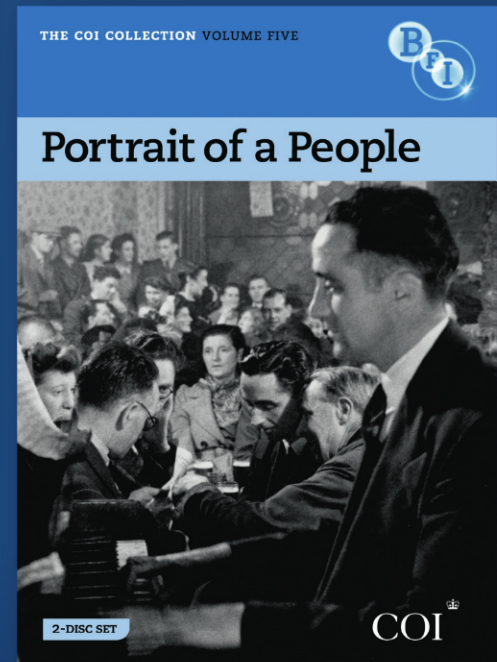
The rhythms and rituals of British life on film



A rich collection of films documenting a century of British folk customs and ancient rural games.



The idyllic, rural past of a Suffolk village comes to life in this bizarre and little seen pastoral drama.



The fifth volume in the COI Collection explores the theme of Britain and, more importantly, its people.

Tearing up the rule book

Louis Malle was deeply concerned with realism—even when depicting unrealistic events, writes **Tim Lucas**

Zazie dans le métro

Louis Malle; France 1960; Criterion/Region 1 DVD/Region A Blu-ray; 92 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: French TV interviews with Malle, novelist Raymond Queneau, actress Catherine Demongeot and screenwriter Jean-Paul Rappeneau, audio interview with artistic consultant William Klein, 2005 video piece featuring assistant director Philippe Collin, French trailer, booklet

Black Moon

Louis Malle; France/Germany 1975; Criterion/Region 1 DVD/Region A Blu-ray; 100 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: French television interview with Malle, stills gallery, alternate French-dubbed soundtrack, French trailer, booklet

A rare commercial filmmaker who devoted one third of his output to documentary cinema, Louis Malle was deeply concerned with the question of realism. His features employ fiction almost as a lubricant to help audiences venture into sensitive areas of human experience not often explored in commercial film (the sexuality of minors and the aged, unromanticised adultery, incest, suicide), evoking realism texturally whenever it isn't naturally present. As his colleague Philippe Collin reveals in a video piece accompanying the first of these new Criterion releases (available on standard disc and Blu-ray), Malle shot his debut feature, 1958's 'Lift to the Scaffold', on black-and-white Tri-X film, a stock traditionally reserved for documentaries, which gave it the visual immediacy and grit of something shot on the fly. These two complementary films, 'Zazie dans le métro' and 'Black Moon', are unusual for Malle because their shared experimental goal was to provoke an unusual response from their audience with unrealistic events presented as realistically as possible. Both films are also available in the UK as part of two older Malle box-sets, but the impressive Criterion transfers benefit from more meticulous restoration, removable subtitles and valuable supplements.

'Zazie', Malle's third feature, is based on Raymond Queneau's 1959 absurdist, virtually plotless and reputedly 'unfilmable' novella, which – with equal absurdity – became a major bestseller in France. "The importance of Queneau's book," said Malle, "is that it is a very probing critique of language, writing and literature. By transposing it to film I wanted to make a critique of the language of cinema." It's the very simple story of a 12-year-old girl from the French provinces,



Über-film: 'Zazie dans le métro'

It is a kaleidoscopic celebration of all the tools and techniques available to cinema

Zazie (Catherine Demongeot, who briefly reprised the role in Godard's 'Une femme est une femme'), who comes to Paris with her mother; when the mother immediately runs off with a romantic stranger, Zazie is left in the care of her amiably plump uncle Gabriel (Philippe Noiret), an exotic dancer. Zazie's wildest dream is the Parisian's commonplace: to ride the métro – but, with the underground train on strike, she must make her own fun, mocking the adult world around her.

Working with New York photographer William Klein, whose 1958 documentary 'Broadway by Light' had impressed him, Malle took his camera crew on to the streets of Paris and proceeded to break every cinematic rule in the book – using the same group of extras in different scenes and roles, framing conversations with the same background on both sides of the shot, changing film speeds at will, invading a documentary feel with gags



War of the sexes: 'Black Moon'

swiped from Tex Avery cartoons. In the novel, Queneau describes Gabriel's wife Albertine as "delicate"; whenever she speaks, breathes or kickstarts a motor scooter, she does so "delicately", until the joke is hammered into the ground. Malle achieves a similar effect by having actress Carla Marlier portray Albertine with a porcelain, immobile face which we follow as it goes from beautiful to funny to bizarre to a kind of nightmarish living death mask. Such is the effect of the film as a whole, which begins as freewheeling, infectiously zany, iconoclastic and liberating, and continues to accelerate into a kind of hypervisual-kinetic psychosis. That said, 'Zazie dans le métro', more so than any other work before or of its time, seems the indisputable starting-point of the Swinging 60s, and a particular influence on the films of Richard Lester and The Beatles. Note the pre-'Help!' polar bear and madcap tour bus.

Malle subtitled his personal copy of the 'Zazie' script 'anti-film', but it is actually an über-film – a kaleidoscopic celebration of all the tools and techniques available to cinema. 'Black Moon', made in the wake of Malle's realistic masterpiece 'Lacombe, Lucien' (1974), is a far more persuasive case for 'anti-film'. It follows 15-year-old Lily (Cathryn Harrison) through a series of eventful non-events in a fantastic rural landscape where men and women have declared militaristic war on one another, while strange animals and trampled flowers do most of the talking. Working with Ghislain Uhry (co-writer/production designer), Joyce Buñuel (daughter-in-law of Don Luis, dialogue) and Bergman cinematographer Sven

Nykvist, Malle follows Lily, introduced in male disguise, to an isolated cottage where a pair of sexually ambiguous twins (Joe Dallesandro, Alexandra Stewart), both also named Lily, communicate by caressing her bones, and care for a nameless bedridden German woman (Therese Giehse) who sends out occasional reports via ham radio (à la 'Orphée') and is kept alive with the female twin's breast milk. It is a duty young Lily eventually assumes as time spent inside the dwelling awakens her to her intuition and biology.

Much has been written about the film as a wilfully subconscious, psychological study of a girl's sexual awakening, but it is more an awakening to her inner self, her feminine nature, than to interest in sex. The film calculatedly withdraws from the usual requirements of entertainment to say that with silence comes understanding, while words push us past the brink of war. (Appropriately, neither the English nor the French audio track feels organic to the images, and the extras are moot.) As we inhabit Lily's watchful silence we become more appreciative of our world's sensuality and strangeness, all of which is filmed naturalistically, with the exception of a talking unicorn – but even that illusion is achieved with costuming rather than optical effects. Malle's insistence on absolute naturalism somehow makes the sights and sounds of 'Black Moon' all the more surreal, but the film resists conscious courting, preferring to be experienced and absorbed. The incidental presence of nude, prepubescent boys and girls, cavorting with hogs and each other, may be unsettling to some viewers.

NEW RELEASES

Carmen

Francesco Rosi; France/Italy 1984; Second Sight/Region 2 DVD/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 149/155 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1 (DVD anamorphic); Features: documentary, location report

Film: Originally released shortly after a flurry of diverse *Carmen* adaptations by Peter Brook, Jean-Luc Godard and Carlos Saura, Francesco Rosi's version is the most ostensibly traditional, returning to *verismo* basics by taking Bizet's opera, restoring its spoken interludes, filming it in mostly outdoor Spanish locations and mixing natural sounds obtrusively into the pre-recorded score. Although purists have balked at the end result (Gilbert Adair's *Monthly Film Bulletin* review was wholly dismissive), it often works brilliantly, thanks largely to Julia Migenes's sweaty, sultry Carmen, a more physically convincing incarnation of whom it is hard to imagine. If Plácido Domingo is a little stiff by comparison, that fits Don José's character, and there's no faulting his musical contribution.

Disc: The Blu-ray wasn't supplied for review, but even the DVD is a marked improvement on its ten-year-old predecessor. Crucially, the sound (presented in original stereo and remixed multi-channel formats) is first-rate. A 48-minute retrospective documentary includes interviews with Rosi and key collaborators. (MB)

Chelsea on the Rocks

Abel Ferrara; US 2008; Wild Side Video/Region 2; 86 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.77:1; Features: interview with Abel Ferrara

Film: Although maverick New York filmmaker Abel Ferrara had already made the move to Rome by 2008, he returned to his home turf to record the passing of one of the most iconic hotels of all time into the hands of new management and its inevitable conversion into a 'boutique' experience. Immortalised in song by Leonard Cohen and Bob Dylan, and on celluloid by Andy Warhol, the Chelsea, prominently located on Manhattan's 23rd Street, opened as a hotel in 1905 and soon became associated with an eccentric batch of long-term residents and the many artistic and would-be artistic figures who passed through. Dylan Thomas died on the premises, Jack Kerouac wrote *On the Road* there, leading artists left their work on the walls to pay their rent, and by the 1970s it became essential for attaining rock credibility to have spent at least a few nights in the Chelsea.

Ferrara, also a one-time resident, is ultimately less interested in the building's illustrious past than in decrying the hotel's imminent transformation. He interviews various residents past and



Coeur fidèle Jean Epstein, his head stuffed with the expressive possibilities of silent cinema, unleashes an arsenal of dazzling effects in his second feature

present (and, like Julien Temple in his recent documentaries, doesn't seem to think we need the help of a caption to know who they are). Some are obvious enough, like an affable Ethan Hawke, who made a film himself about the hotel's inhabitants, and Milos Forman, who lived there on his arrival in the US. But to describe the result as a

documentary would be inadequate, as the film is nothing if not loose. Obvious dramatisations of a partying Janis Joplin and the fateful residency of Sid Vicious and Nancy Spungen (which asserts that her death was not of Sid's doing) come and go, and Ferrara's interview technique – rambling across people's conversations and often appearing not even to be listening to them –

would soon have him fired from the BBC. Archive material is thrown in here and there, including a fair smattering of scenes from Nigel Finch's celebrated *Arena* documentary. The star turn is, of course, the hotel's eccentric former manager Stanley Bard; seated in the lobby, he rails against the new management, while no one is around to put the case for the defence.

Disc: This DVD – retitled *Chelsea Hotel* – has been very much made for a French audience, with non-removable French subtitles (often a lot more coherent than what they are purportedly translating) and a French voiceover imposed on the Ferrara interview. A US Region 1 release is also available, presumably free of these encumbrances. (DT)

Coeur fidèle

Jean Epstein; France 1923; Eureka/Region 2 DVD/Region B Blu-ray Dual Format; Certificate PG; 54 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features: stills gallery, booklet

Film: Narratively, Jean Epstein's second feature is a straightforward Marseilles-set love-triangle melodrama that, if filmed straightforwardly, would probably have been long forgotten. But Epstein's treatment was anything but: his head stuffed with silent cinema's expressive possibilities (turbo-charged by exposure to Abel Gance's *La Roue*), he unleashes an arsenal of effects ranging from the whirling camera and dazzling cutting of the famous fairground sequence to close-ups of faces and fists lit to appear almost three-dimensional.

But the film is at its most potent in the quieter moments, as double-exposed dreams scud across the faces of Gina Manès and Léon Mathot's lovers as they contemplate life without each other.

Disc: Sourced from the Cinémathèque Française restoration, this is in remarkable condition for an 88-year-old film, with damage kept to a gratifying minimum. The Blu-ray is demonstration quality (though the DVD is no slouch either), and Maxence Cyrin's sparse piano accompaniment is mostly very effective. The only on-disc extra is an extensive stills gallery, but the 44-page booklet compiles valuable archive material by Epstein, René Clair, Jean Cocteau, Abel Gance, Marcel L'Herbier and Henri Langlois. (MB)

The Colossus of New York

Eugène Lourié; US 1958; Olive Films/Region 1 NTSC; 70 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.78:1

Film: A little-known gadzooks sci-fi indie from the fecund post-war years of American genre heaven, this dizzyingly literate beauty secretly sports a prodigious résumé: produced by Welles cohort William Alland, scored by theremin maven Van Cleave, shot by Hitchcock stalwart John F. Warren and based on a story by Willis Goldbeck, whose script credits run from *Freaks* to *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. (Director Eugène Lourié was a Renoir-trained art director who worked with L'Herbier, Chaplin and Fuller, but helmed mostly FX sci-fi programmers such as *The Giant Behemoth*.)

The ambition oozes out of the film; in a decade of pulp indies that aimed low at drive-in teenagers, this movie simply feels weird, strangely intellectualised, pregnant with import and secrets. The focus is on a family of scientists – two grown sons (one a world-class genius, played by *The Wild Wild West* star Ross Martin) and a megalomaniacal father (Otto Kruger, who handles his heady paragraphs of scientific spleen with icy gusto, and comes off almost too convincing). When the star son is killed, the survivors decide to put his peerless brain inside a seven-foot, Jack Kirby-ish robot, with an obligatory but unpredictable litany of disasters to follow. The living son (John Baragrey) installs a safety switch – "So he won't be able to destroy himself." "Why should he?" the father asks. "Why shouldn't he?" is the reply. The machine itself is shaped like a god but suffers serious glitches, not the least of which is an existential quail. The crisis is emotional – the lost man in the colossus laments the contact he cannot have with his wife and child, and rebels against the father's grandiose visions of *Ubersmenschen*. Unsurprisingly hampered by a low budget, Lourié's movie is a palm-sized breath-catcher, with uncanny visions of the robot simply walking across the bottom of the East River to cross from Manhattan to Long Island and, in the end, the colossus going mad and becoming a Randian fascist bent on eliminating human 'trash' – in a movie



Officer class: 'Carmen'

NEW RELEASES

← released just one year after *Atlas Shrugged* climbed the bestseller lists. Whew.

Disc: A fine transfer but no supplements, which is a shame – what we'd give to learn more about this oddity's provenance. (MA)

Dark of the Sun

Jack Cardiff; US/UK 1968; Warner Archive/Region 1; 100 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9

Film: Gunslinger cinematographer Jack Cardiff's mid-career turn to directing, which produced 13 features, reached a high mark in critical esteem with 1960's *Sons and Lovers*. What followed was a rocky decline in prestige, though anyone who can deny the charm of, say, *The Mutations* (1974) when viewed in the wee hours is made of sterner stuff than I.

Dark of the Sun, adapted (seemingly freely) from an early potboiler by Wilbur Smith, was released in the summer of 1968. The script's gestures towards progress collide head-on with the actual film's overriding sense of apocalypse – it's a movie in conversation with Peckinpah's machine-gun diplomacy, filmed a year ahead of *The Wild Bunch*. It stars Rod Taylor, then beginning a string of athletic, hard-and-nasty roles, and legendary American football player

Jim Brown, fresh from another take-no-prisoners actioner, *The Dirty Dozen*.

Taylor is a soldier of fortune; Brown is his partner, an American-educated Congolese returning home for patriotic purposes during his country's mid-60s crisis. Along with Peter Carsten's unregenerate Nazi and a platoon of local mercs, they're hired to travel by steam train into the country's interior to rescue employees of a Belgian diamond company – and, more importantly, the diamonds – from Simba insurgents. Though Taylor and Brown took a deep dislike to one another on set, they team well; Brown's towering tenderness gives individual human distinction to the character's abstract idealisation, and he's a fine foil to Taylor's hurtling, rabid-slashbuckler physicality.

Taylor is at the centre of much kamikaze action, including a chainsaw duel and a coccyx-pounding off-road ride in a jeep along a rocky riverbed. There's a great feel for the suicidal brio of the career adventurer, and that sense of life spent in proximity to death informs the razor's-edge set pieces – such as a minute-hand-watching wait on a time-locked diamond vault and the train's agonisingly slow, chuffing escapes, the last of which ends with a tragic uncoupling, a slow, sickening backslide into a waiting Simba mob and a carnival of horror. The action is



Cool cat: 'The Great White Silence'

matched throughout by a life-and-death moral dimension that rarely breaches sermonising, though the film's final tribute to the rule of law seems an insufficient answer to its preceding images of abject bedlam.

Disc: A typically no-frills Warner on-demand package, but the movie is vividly here, and that's a lot. (NP)

The Great White Silence

Herbert Ponting; UK 1924; BFI/Region 2 DVD/Region A Blu-ray Dual Format; Certificate U; 108 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: Ponting's 1933 sound version of his footage, documentaries on the film restoration and Simon Fisher Turner's score, location field recordings (2010) from Scott's expedition hut, archive newsreel items, essay booklet

Film: Now immaculately and imaginatively restored by the BFI, expedition photographer Herbert Ponting's breathtaking 1924 feature following Captain Scott's ill-fated 1910 expedition to the South Pole is among the great early documentaries. Enjoyably heterogeneous – it resembles at different points a lantern-lecture, a home movie, a nature study and a ripping adventure story – it combines its disparate elements with jaunty intertitles to give a thrilling immediacy to this well-known slice of history. Ponting's eye seems omnivorous – Scott's men coined the verb 'to pont' to describe his endlessly patient work securing shots in sub-zero temperatures. You can glimpse it in blithely unselfconscious scenes where he's pecked by suspicious penguins, whose breeding season he lovingly and lengthily records. Despite the fact that he hadn't used a cine camera previously, Ponting's Antarctic landscapes have a terrible and accomplished beauty, emphasised by surreally tinted sequences that mimic the local light effects.

This atmospheric melding of the real and the artificial in pale primrose

icebergs or beryl-tinted gales at sea is echoed in Simon Fisher Turner's eerie new score of humming electronica, which makes piercing use of 'found sounds' such as the Terra Nova ship's bell, or a stretch of silence recorded in Scott's cabin. As the clowning sequences of ice-field football and basking seals give way to Scott's trek to the Pole, the film's poignancy is heightened by extraordinarily intimate footage of the explorer and his small team training to cram themselves cheerfully into a wind-lashed tent and cook pemmican soup. Since Ponting didn't go on the final leg of the journey, their doomed trek is plotted chiefly by rudimentary model animations and extracts from Scott's journal ("Great God, this is an awful place") but still manages to be deeply affecting. One of the few films that genuinely earn the overworked epithet 'national treasure'.

Disc: An impeccable transfer, whose restored images have a startling clarity on Blu-ray, right down to the explorers' frostbitten fingers and faces. Extras include 90' *South*, Ponting's 1933 sound version of the expedition, which incorporates his own commentary and makes for fascinating viewing. Other generous extras lift the lid usefully on the film's restoration and scoring processes. (KS)

Korkoro

Tony Gatlif; France 2009; Lorber Films/Region 1 NTSC; 111 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1; Features: trailer

Film: Ever since 1993's *Latcho Drom*, Tony Gatlif has become the official chronicler/balladeer of the 20th-century Romani experience, though he's much more than an anthropologist – his films are conscientiously Gypsy in spirit, and he has this swatch of nomad turf all to himself. *Korkoro* may be his most ambitious film, in so far as it could be thought of as the Roma version of the Tavianis' *The Night of San Lorenzo* (1982), following an extended caravan

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family trying to evade the tightening web of the Nazi encroachment and the cooperating (read: bigoted) Vichy forces in France in 1943. Exploring this pivotal historical intersection for the first time, *Gatlif* may have come upon his most salient ethnic dynamic – from this film's perspective, the Roma's peripatetic identity (the title is Romani for 'freedom') was particularly assaulted by the Nazis' control, and the whole film feels like one long bristling desire to simply start running and never look back.

Reportedly the first feature about the *porajmos* ('the devouring'), *Gatlif*'s film begins with a magical stunner: concentration-camp barbed wire strumming by itself in rhyme with the melancholy opening soundtrack theme. The clan we meet (complete with an iconic madman, played acrobatically by James Thierrée as a kind of ur-Gypsy, dying to escape any sort of imposed order or law) are on the run from the war but not for long – they run out of wilderness and get quasi-adopted by one French village's humanist vet (Marc Lavoine) and schoolteacher (Marie-Josée Croze) just as the noose starts tightening, the nomads are forbidden to roam and the local camps begin filling up. Complicating matters is an orphan boy (the fortuitously named Mathias Laliberté) who attaches himself to both the travellers and the vet.

Despite the scope of its subject, *Korkoro* is less an epic than a snapshot, a lyric, and far more energetic and crazy than its Taviani interface suggests. (One shouldn't underestimate the coolness of old Romani style – dishevelled rock-star looks in black silk vests and pleated trousers.) *Gatlif* knows how to limn an entire cultural essence in a single image – as when, after the vet has granted his family's old house to the Romani family so that they can be propertied enough to evade the camps, *Gatlif* glimpses them wandering confusedly around the weedy grounds, not knowing how to conduct themselves or own something of value. The staging, camerawork and characters all team with naturalistic brio, and indeed the only aspect of *Gatlif*'s film that doesn't feel entirely vital is the Nazi persecution context itself – have we seen this drill too many times, in too many films?

Disc: Lovely to look at, but no meaningful extras. (MA)

The Makioka Sisters

Ichikawa Kona; Japan 1983; Criterion/Region 1 NTSC; 140 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: trailer, essay by scholar Audie Brock

Film: The middle-of-the-road classicist of post-war Japanese cinema, Ichikawa Kona hasn't seen his star rise in the past few decades, despite, at least, the almost-forgotten but nonetheless fiery passion of *The Burmese Harp* (1956). His long career exudes few patterns; call it eclecticism or inconstancy, but either way Ichikawa has been, like so many Hollywood studio auteurs,

Linking pinkies again

Alec Guinness dubbed Ernie Kovacs "just about the funniest man I ever met". Fellow fan Nick Pinkerton celebrates a comedy pioneer

The Ernie Kovacs Collection

Shout! Factory/Region 1; US 1951-62; 780 minutes total; Aspect Ratio 4:3

Ernie Kovacs was a strapping, mad Magyar, with a black pompadour and omnipresent cigar completing his broad, comic hussar's face. With his rummaged-up medieval-modern aesthetic, polyglot characters and non-sequitur mind, Kovacs invaded American living-rooms in the 1950s and early 1960s with a televised variety show of the absurd – "linking pinkies over the orthicon tube", in the words of his alter ego Percy Dovetonsils.

Kovacs became a national figure but his reputation was nearly buried with him in 1962. Just shy of his 43rd birthday, he horseshoed his station wagon around a utility pole while leaving a christening party at Billy Wilder's place, on his way to a lavishly appointed Coldwater Canyon home stocked with fine wines and first editions for which he was deeply in hock.

Kovacs had a brief film career, playing mostly uniformed types. He's the Batista police chief dogging Alec Guinness in 'Our Man in Havana' (1959); Guinness found him "in a Goonish way, just about the funniest man I ever met". (There are a million such testimonies.) But the prodigious, profligate dozen years before Kovacs's premature death were primarily devoted to television.

Born in the Hungarian neighbourhood of Trenton, New Jersey, in early 1919, Kovacs got hooked on applause in summer stock, worked as a local disc jockey, then jumped the fence to television in 1950. In those early days, TV's empty schedules were populated by cinema castaways, nightclub acts, gossip columnists, bandleaders – all importing their own performance prejudices. Kovacs, running his shows as laboratories, was on his own experimenting with effects and possibilities intrinsic to the curious small screen.

For a long time, in gauging Kovacs's accomplishments, one had either to trust the consortium of critics, late-night hosts and video artists who comprise his admirers, or content oneself with two existing DVDs of the late material, teasing out greatest-hits anthologies made for public television in 1977. (I was initiated when Comedy Central precursor The Comedy Channel ran Kovacs material in the early 1990s.)

Shout! Factory's game-changing new six-DVD box-set goes all the way back to never-in-print material broadcast out of Philadelphia's WPTZ studios, which



King of comedy: Ernie Kovacs

He invaded American living-rooms with a televised variety show of the absurd

shows Kovacs's fourth-wall-busting, self-reflexive sense of humour already in place. Before commercial breaks, an interloper invades scenes to shout, "Hold it! Don't nobody move!" – followed by a back-on-air "Re-e-e-sume". The camera follows Ernie out of the studio to the hall drinking fountain; elsewhere, it cranes out of the window to watch him on his way to work, dragging a life-sized female rag doll down Walnut Street. This formative material shows the clubby, casual demeanour of Kovacs's free-form live TV. Treading air time, erratic material hits and misses in equal proportion. Volubly complaining about his budget, Kovacs takes each in his stride.

Ever alert for pay cheques, Kovacs later hosted a showcase for pre-talkies film called 'Silents Please' from his den – appropriate for one drawn towards pantomime comedy. His 1957 'Eugene' special was silent save foley sound; he elsewhere had objects in empty rooms dance in synchronicity to classical pieces, and repeatedly featured a mute trio of automaton ape-masked musicians, the Nairobi Trio. Each disc includes cherry-picked routines alongside full episodes of Kovacs's various shows, illustrating his development as he moved towards more conceptual material, culminating in the effects-heavy, pre-taped ABC specials of 1961-62.

This fanciful, tirelessly giggling buccaneer landed wherever he could find

a timeslot, from morning to daytime to late-night, network to network, Philly to New York to Los Angeles, everywhere carrying his theme music ('Oriental Blues'), his sensibility and the small but devoted audience who kept his name alive. Kovacs also accumulated a repertory cast of characters, including 'Poet Laureate' Dovetonsils, a mincing poetaster in a tiger-patterned smoking jacket who recited frightening verse from a lace-fringed pasteboard album and stirred his Martini with a daisy ("In the hurly burly of a variety show, it's sometimes not amiss to have a moment of retrospect..."). Additional roles were filled by a troupe of collaborators: Kovacs's second wife Edie Adams, vaudeville mushmouth Al Kelly, eventual David Letterman announcer Bill Wendell, and an eye-candy blonde billed simply as 'Barbara' (in fact Barbara Loden, who would later go on to direct 'Wanda', one of the most uncompromised films on American low-life).

Shout! Factory's box-set unseals the archive founded by Kovacs's widow Adams, who died in 2008. (A classically trained soprano and up-for-anything comedienne, she is visible in songs and skits throughout.) Alongside other contextualising essays in an extensive booklet, son Josh Mills recalls Adams rescuing the original kinescopes and videotapes of Kovacs's work from the networks, which were then 'filing' their holdings at the bottom of the Hudson River.

The memorialised Kovacs legend will, perchance, die with the exposure of original sources – but who'll miss it? Ernie rides again!

The view from the street

Tsuchimoto Noriaki's films are immersed in the language, perceptions and environment of his subjects, says Chris Fujiwara

On the Road: A Document/Minamata: The Victims and Their World

Tsuchimoto Noriaki; Japan 1964/71; Zakka Films/Region-free; 54/120 minutes; Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: liner notes with essay by Abé Mark Nornes and film commentaries by Mizuno Sachiko

"To record the reality in front of me as truthfully as I could was the only way I could define myself," said Tsuchimoto Noriaki (1928-2008), one of Japan's greatest documentary filmmakers. The remark reveals not modesty so much as a tremendous integrity. Tsuchimoto's cinema embodies a search for a point of view capable of representing the point of view of his subjects, and an immersion of the filmmaker's subjectivity in the contradictions of his material.

A left-wing political activist in his university years, Tsuchimoto later joined a public-relations film production company, where his fellow directors included Hani Susumu and Ogawa Shinsuke. 'On the Road: A Document' (1964) was a breakthrough film – a study of the frustrations and worries of Tokyo taxi drivers as seen from the streets. Constantly imaginative and vigorous in depicting movement but never fetishising it in a facile or celebratory way, 'On the Road' has the working-class speed and grimness of an early-1930s Warner Bros film, at the same time reshaping stray observational surprises in the manner of Beat poetry: a huge photograph of Romy Schneider looming sphinx-like over Christmas shoppers; the ticking of a clock dubbed over a shot of a blowtorch slowly working over the surface of a wrecked car; guys in the lunchroom passing round an X-ray of a colleague's stomach as if it were the latest 'Playboy'. The film establishes a hallmark of Tsuchimoto's work: his closeness to the perceptions, language and environment of his subjects. It's to them that the director attributed the liveliness of his film: "I've been told that 'On the Road' is exciting, with various shots colliding in it," he said in Fujiwara Toshi's 2007 portrait 'Cinema Is About Documenting Lives: The Works and Times of Noriaki Tsuchimoto'. "But they simply came from the words spoken by the drivers who were risking their lives on a daily basis."

A turning-point in Tsuchimoto's life and work came with his involvement in the struggle for recognition and reparation for the victims of an environmental disaster and a devastating neurological disease both known by



Driving force: 'On the Road: A Document'

the name of the fishing village of Minamata. From the 1930s, the Chisso Corporation had been dumping mercury-filled waste from its local plant into the sea; the mercury attacked the central nervous system of those who ate locally caught fish, causing a range of debilitating symptoms and even death. The disease also struck foetuses carried by afflicted women, causing deformities and mental impairment.

The body of work Tsuchimoto devoted to the victims, their families and their surroundings encompassed 17 films, of which 'Minamata: The Victims and Their World' is the most widely known. Tsuchimoto isn't afraid to let his camera roll for extended shots of afflicted patients, with results that are alternately harrowing, tender and deeply sad. He also commits himself to the texture and details of the everyday lives of the people of Minamata: a striking sequence shows an octopus fisherman trudging through shallow water, the many-tentacled bundle of his catch dangling behind him on a rope. In such scenes, the film suggests life continuing and the possibility of renewal.

Tsuchimoto uses the synchronisation of sound and image as an emotional element. At one point a woman says

A turning-point came with his involvement in the struggle for reparation for the victims of the Minamata disaster

with great passion that, having seen the truth of the state, she must fight against it till the end of her life – but at the same time a non-synchronous close-up shows her talking much more composedly. The sound-image relationship reaches its height of complexity in the film's magnificent set-piece sequence of a Chisso shareholders' meeting, where a group of Minamata Disease sufferers and their supporters confront the corporate officers over the company's responsibility for the tragedy. As we watch the executives on stage making their ceremonial speeches, their voices are completely absent from the soundtrack, while their accusers' impassioned voices alone are heard. Watching such scenes in the wake of the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami in north-east Japan and the nuclear crisis at Fukushima, it is impossible not to feel the resonance of Tsuchimoto's examination of environmental disaster and governmental and corporate responsibility.

Zakka Films' presentation of these two masterworks is, on the whole, acceptable. (Zakka has also released DVDs of two of the films Tsuchimoto made in Afghanistan: 'Another Afghanistan: Kabul Diary' and 'Traces: The Kabul Museum'). The image quality of 'Minamata' is fair; 'On the Road' comes from a crisper source. The English subtitles for both films seem generally adequate if sometimes sketchy, and the liner notes are good. I hope this release will lead to further subtitled editions of Tsuchimoto's films, such as the beautiful 'Shiranui Sea' (1975), and other milestones of Japanese documentary.

only as memorable as his material, which was often imposed from above.

Made in his fourth decade of directing, *The Makioka Sisters* is the kind of humanist epic that could cast a filmmaker's reputation in bronze; in tone and elegiac splendour, it is less "the *Gone with the Wind* of Japanese cinema", as it has been called, than Japan's answer to *Howards End*, *The Magnificent Ambersons* and/or *Once upon a Time in America*, minus the gangsters. The scenario is familiarly Japanese: a large, well-off family faces the crises of modernity, and the weightiest things at stake are properly vetted marriages and the bonds between grown sisters who all have their distinct priorities. The two married older sisters (Kishi Keiko and Sakuma Yoshiko) wrestle gently for control of the haughty clan's destiny and its lingering fortune from an old kimono business, while the rebellious youngest sibling (Kotegawa Yuko) wants her dowry money now, despite having to wait until shy sister number three (Yoshinaga Sayuri) can find a suitable husband, a process that has already gone on far too long. The mix also includes, crucially, the two brothers-in-law, one of whom (Ishizaka Koji) harbours a sad, barely suppressed pining for the third sister.

Set during the 1930s, in the cherry-blossom heaven of the still pre-urban Osaka countryside, and with 'the war' mentioned only in passing, Ichikawa's film is a scrupulously delicate affair, as carefully primed and refined as a vintage kimono, haunted but also exhilarated by the beauty of tradition. It stands defiantly to one side of the post-New Wave J-trends of the late 1970s and early 1980s; more than that, the film's staid aestheticism (shot in a mainstream mélange of sumptuous establishing shots and looming close-ups) also elides, so says Audie Brock's pamphlet essay, all of Tanizaki Junichiro's celebrated source novel's period trauma, poverty, malnutrition, etc – which may have been a box-office downer for flush 'post-war miracle' ticket-buyers. This context certainly doesn't do this very polite, very middle-class film any favours, but the sense of elegy – headlocked by the Vangelis-like theme by Watanabe Toshiyuki – is powerful nonetheless, and the film pulses with fascinating moments and details: the slow covering of Yoshinaga's demurely exposed leg, three spiteful sisters dissolving into tears as one packs to move, the vision of the misty hillsides precisely evoking ancient screen paintings, the sense of family exhaustion palpable in the hunt for a marriageable single man.

Disc: The new digital restoration is Criterion-spotless but the disc otherwise lacks the usual battery of supplements, coming only with Brock's essay, which is rather dry and seems to misread key moments in the film – a climactic scene of Ishizaka's love-struck husband drinking himself stupid once the sister he covertly wanted is out of reach is termed "humorous" when it is clearly tragic. (MA)

No Surrender

Peter Smith; UK 1985; Second Sight/
Region 2; Certificate 15; Aspect Ratio
1.33:1; Features: 'making of' featurette

Film: This dark and often brutal comedy-drama, scripted by Alan Bleasdale in the wake of the success of *Boys from the Blackstuff*, underlines how grim 1980s Britain often was. The Liverpool it depicts is a city of decaying, boarded-up houses; the nightclub where much of the action takes place is in an urban wasteland. Everyone is trying so hard to survive that they're brutal as a matter of course – kids prowl the streets, threatening to vandalise cars unless they're paid protection money; teenagers pick on blind men, who are ready to head-butt them and fight back. In its own dark way, however, the film is often very funny – Bleasdale's screenplay delights, for example, in the sectarian rivalry between two groups of foul-mouthed OAPs in fancy dress. There are surrealistic elements and moments of stylisation, but there's nothing whimsical about the behaviour of the gangland boss who owns the club and is busy torturing a rival as preparations get under way for the New Year's Eve celebrations.

The filmmakers have assembled some excellent character actors: the jowly and imposing Ray McAnally as a loyalist bruiser who's being blackmailed by a terrorist on the run; Bernard Hill as a sardonic and physically imposing bouncer; Michael Angelis as the club's long-suffering manager. Some of the in-jokes fall a little flat (Elvis Costello as a novelty act/magician who can do everything "apart from sing") and at times the plotting is erratic. But if the structure is akin to that of a shaggy-dog story, at least it's a very lively one.

Disc: The disc includes a 'making of' featurette in which Mamoun Hassan of the National Film Finance Corporation discusses the near-impossibility of financing British films in the late 1980s without public funding. On films such as *Gregory's Girl* and *Dance with a Stranger* this meant that the NFFC (despite having very limited funds itself) played an absolutely crucial role.



Obsession It's hard not to respond to the sheer single-mindedness with which De Palma treats the material as a doomy, music-driven reverie

Hassan explains that the Corporation's agenda was always "to change the climate, change the taste". It therefore took funding decisions on risky projects – including *No Surrender* – that other financiers wouldn't touch. (GM)

Obsession

Brian De Palma; US 1976; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 12; 98 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1; Features: 'making of', De Palma shorts 'Woton's Wake' (1962) and 'The Responsive Eye' (1966), theatrical trailer, booklet including Paul Schrader's original screenplay

Film: During the mid-1970s, Hitchcock's *Vertigo* was largely kept off the screen by legal wrangles, but Brian De Palma and Paul Schrader caught a rare showing, went out to dinner afterwards and conjured up their own thriller scenario by way of a tribute. Coming just after *Phantom of the Paradise* in the De Palma filmography, and thus before the box-

office breakthrough of *Carrie*, the result was this independently financed feature from an era when Hollywood filmmakers still got the chance to follow their own wayward path. Tonally it takes all its cues from Hitchcock, with Vilmos Zsigmond's dreamily diffuse images unfolding at a stately pace to the insistent urgings of Bernard Herrmann's self-referential score, while the story ticks the boxes of memory, loss and psychosis as New Orleans landowner Cliff Robertson slips into obsessive mourning when his beloved wife dies during a kidnapping, then later falls helplessly for a mystery woman who seems to be her double. Somewhat predictable plotting rather inhibits the overall impact, yet it's hard not to respond to the sheer single-mindedness with which De Palma treats the material as a doomy, music-driven reverie, where emotions come from the prevailing mood of sickly unease, not to mention tremendously attuned performances from Robertson and Geneviève Bujold. Perhaps not utterly persuasive, but still quite something.

Disc: The fine-grained 1080p transfer captures the unique atmosphere of the deliberately fogged cinematography, while lossless audio gives Herrmann's full-on score its head. A useful Laurent Bouzereau documentary (first seen on the 2001 DVD) looks at why Schrader's screenplay was never filmed in full. The booklet contains the complete original script – then titled 'Déjà Vu'. (TJ)

Pigs & Battleships/ Stolen Desire

Imamura Shohei; Japan 1961/58; Eureka/Region 2 DVD/Region B Blu-ray Dual Format; Certificate 15; 108/92 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1 (DVD anamorphic); Features: booklet

Films: Taking a leaf out of the BFI's Ozu playbook, Masters of Cinema has opted

to double-bill its third Imamura Blu-ray release, pairing a higher-profile title with a more obscure earlier film – in this case the director's debut *Stolen Desire*. It's markedly weaker than *Pigs & Battleships*, but its portrait of a low-rent travelling kabuki-plus-striptease troupe is nonetheless valuable for revealing that Imamura's lifelong affinity with the dregs of society was present and (politically in-) correct from the start of his directing career. Its central protagonist, idealistic middle-class student Kunida (Nagato Hiroyuki), may be a surrogate for Imamura himself, spurning higher-status jobs in favour of seeking possibly illusory theatrical 'truth' – though his collaborators seem more interested in sex and money.

Nagato also headlines Imamura's extraordinary fifth feature as the naive would-be gangster Kinto, embroiled in a series of farcical plots to exploit assorted foreign visitors in the port of Yokosuka – be they randy US sailors or Chinese and Korean rivals. Kinto's girlfriend Haruko (Yoshimura Jitsuko) fears for his future but isn't above dabbling in the odd bit of prostitution herself – though she does at least attempt to think beyond the next five minutes, and Imamura is expectedly alert to the wider sociological issues. The film is riddled with pigs of both the metaphorical and literal kind, the latter being raised by Kinto's associates in an ambitious attempt to corner the local pork market; when they swarm unchecked through the red-light district, it's tempting to recall the final lines of Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

Disc: Presented in its original Nikkatsuscope aspect ratio, *Pigs & Battleships* looks terrific. The Blu-ray is a clear advance on the Criterion DVD, especially the queasy close-ups juxtaposing pig skin and human flesh. Optional subtitles conscientiously translate essential text, such as the punchline to a billboard gag. However, *Stolen Desire* is noticeably softer, with little apparent difference between the DVD and Blu-ray versions. There are no on-disc extras, but Tony Rayns's context-setting booklet essays provide ample compensation. (MB)

Resurrected

Paul Greengrass; UK 1989; Second Sight/Region 2; Certificate 15; 88 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: interviews with Paul Greengrass and David Thewlis

Film: Paul Greengrass's debut feature is inspired by the true story of guardsman Philip Williams, who disappeared and was presumed dead during the Falklands War, only to reappear several weeks later. A youthful David Thewlis plays Private Deakin, the soldier 'resurrected' after turning up in a farmer's house in the Falklands, seemingly suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome. Back home in Britain, Deakin is given an ambivalent welcome: the army formally clears him of desertion but there are deep suspicions about his behaviour. In his home village in Lancashire, where



Foot note: 'The Makioka Sisters'

NEW RELEASES

← a memorial service has already been held for him, he is initially treated as a returning hero – but gradually the community begins to shun him, and when he goes back to barracks his fellow soldiers treat him with brutality.

Greengrass shoots in the same pared-down, naturalistic style you associate with the *World in Action* documentaries he made his name on, and the scenes set in Lancashire are especially well observed. Deakin's parents, played by Tom Bell and Rita Tushingham, are perplexed by what their son is going through, while the locals in the pub are torn between their loyalty towards him and the nagging feeling (fuelled by rabid, nationalistic tabloid articles) that he might be a coward who has let down queen and country. Thewlis gives a very affecting performance as the tormented young soldier who has no clear memory of what happened to him and therefore no way of defending himself.

The barracks scenes are the weakest part of the film. Greengrass and screenwriter Martin Allen (better known for his work on *Coronation Street*) don't address the roots of the bullying, and Deakin's fellow soldiers (and their officers) seem cruel and wantonly vindictive.

Disc: The picture quality isn't as sharp as might be expected. The main extras are two new interviews with Greengrass (who waxes nostalgic for Granada in its glory years) and Thewlis. (GM)

They Went into Space

The Silent Star

Kurt Maetzig; East Germany/Poland 1959; 90 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1

Signals: An Adventure in Space

Gottfried Kolditz; East Germany/Poland 1970; 88 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1

Pirx's Test Flight

Marek Piestrak; Poland/Estonia/Ukraine 1979; 95 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1

The Curse of Snake Valley

Marek Piestrak; Poland/Estonia 1987; 99 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.70:1

Telewizja Kinopolska/Region 0; Features: short films 'The Friend' and 'Computers', booklet (Polish only)

Films: Shortly before BFI Southbank's Soviet sci-fi season (extolled in *S&S* July 2011), this box-set of the Polish equivalent came out under the domestic title *Pojechane w kosmos* (*They Went into Space*). Unsurprisingly, Stanislaw Lem looms large: the future *Solaris* author's first novel *The Astronauts* became *The Silent Star*, co-produced by East German studio DEFA. The Earth-bound opening is a slog, but from then on it's an unusually intelligent genre film: the spaceship *Kosmokrator*'s multiracial crew anticipates *Star Trek*'s by half a decade, the Venusian landscapes are authentically otherworldly, and the message of international brotherhood

Village fate: 'Went the Day Well?'



Wind Across the Everglades The dramatising of individual scenes is full of inspired framings and shows a great sympathy for the Florida locale

is pleasingly at odds with the space-race willy-waving going on elsewhere.

Similarly ambitious, the 70mm DEFA co-production *Signals: An Adventure in Space* is too blatantly indebted to 2001: *A Space Odyssey* to add much of interest. A spacecraft vanishes near Jupiter and a rescue mission leads to some ho-hum adventure with unconvincing characters, no narrative surprises and only intermittently striking visuals. Superior on every level – bar the *Blake*'s 7 production values – is the Marek Piestrak film *Pirx's Test Flight*, an adaptation of Lem's short story 'The Inquest', which anticipates *Alien* and *Blade Runner* in its scenario of a space mission crewed by humans and uncannily lifelike

androids. Commander Pirx (Sergiusz Desnitsky) is aware of this, but not of individual colleagues' origins, and can't predict how they'll respond in a crisis. Aleksandr Kaidanovsky, Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, is his most enigmatically intense colleague, while Arvo Pärt's score fuses generic sci-fi cliché with the tintinnabular style he was developing at the time.

Offsetting the other films' philosophical seriousness, *The Curse of Snake Valley* is an absolute hoot. A would-be Polish Indiana Jones travels to Vietnam at the behest of a mercenary with the intriguingly *Sierra Madre*-ish name of Bernard Traven, while a female journalist tags along to supply screaming and gratuitous nudity, usually when encountering venomous snakes that appear whenever an ancient manuscript is unfurled. Lacking a decent

literary source this time, director Piestrak blithely tosses in saffron-robed Buddhists, statues with deadly laser eyes, liquids triggering hideous mutations, and a papier-mâché giant serpent that would have disgraced even a 1950s Corman cheapie.

Discs: Like the films, a mixed bag. The source prints are passable, the optional English subtitles adequate, and the soundtracks exclusively in Polish. But aspect ratios are problematic, with the DEFA films severely cropped (*The Silent Star* from 2.35:1 to 1.33:1, *Signals* from 2.20:1 to 1.66:1), though the others look compositionally correct. There are two bonus shorts: *The Friend* (1965) – another Lem story of a turbulent man-machine relationship, while Krzysztof Zanussi's early documentary *Computers* (1967) is a witty and inventive exposition of basic binary principles. (MB)

Went the Day Well?

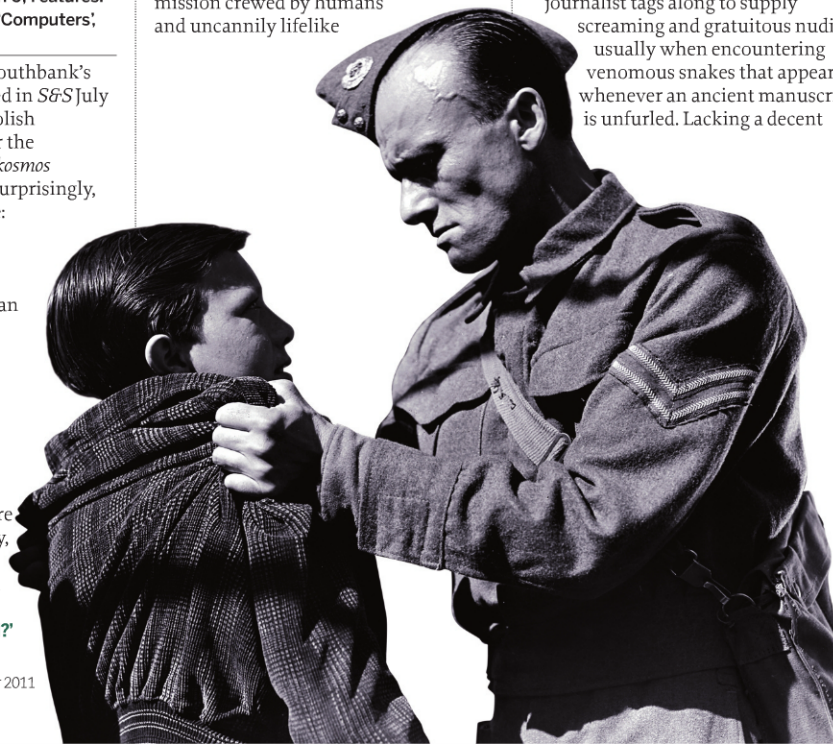
Alberto Cavalcanti; UK 1942; Optimum Classic/Region 2; Certificate PG; 93 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: 'Yellow Caesar' Cavalcanti short, BBC Radio 3 'The Essay' – British Cinema of the 1940s' audio featurette

Film: Long the cineaste's favourite wartime propaganda movie, Cavalcanti's darkly comic invasion drama still surprises and delights with its unexpected second-act change of gear and genre. The film's shadowy, suspenseful visual style and Cavalcanti's Renoir-honed realism don't falter, as this bucolic drama of a village's resistance to German fifth columnists morphs into an action thriller, and the postmistress sinks an axe into her captor, only to be bayoneted for her trouble. By turns robustly patriotic ("Do you know what morale is?" "Something what the wops ain't got"), tense and slyly humorous (poring over a Siege of Paris zoo animal cookbook puts rationing into perspective), the script is as dappled with dark and light tones as the *mise en scène*. Simon Heffer's excellent audio featurette argues persuasively for the film's vision of war as a class-bonding enterprise, and for the enduring power of Mrs Fraser's selfless grenade-snatching heroism. **Disc:** A pristine BFI restoration, packaged with a small but original choice of extras. *Yellow Caesar*'s archive-raiding, finger-pointing mockery of Mussolini uses a hammer to achieve its propaganda ends where *Went the Day Well?* employs a stiletto, but is gripping nonetheless. (KS)

Wind Across the Everglades

Nicholas Ray; US 1958; Wild Side Video/Region 2; 89 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: interviews with Bertrand Tavernier and Bernard Eisenschitz, illustrated booklet written by Patrick Brion

Film: *Wind Across the Everglades* was written and produced by Budd Schulberg, whose acclaimed screenplay for *On the Waterfront* (1954) was directed by Elia Kazan, a fellow collaborator in the Hollywood witch-hunt of the early



1950s. It was Kazan who proposed Nicholas Ray as director of *Everglades*, and indeed the subject-matter – the isolated swamplands of Florida, with their singular inhabitants and their folklore – would seem to be right up his alley, along with the awkward, complex power struggle between idealistic teacher Walt Murdock, representing the Audubon Society, and the monstrous Cottonmouth and his ‘swamp-rats’ who routinely massacre birds for their exotic, fashionable plumage.

However, as the copious extras accompanying this first DVD release explain, it was a far from happy shoot; Schulberg discovered that Ray, the victim of a disastrous amorous liaison, had developed an excessive fondness for alcohol and probably heroin. In fact, Ray was effectively fired before filming was concluded, with the final scenes between Cottonmouth and Murdock directed by Schulberg himself. As Ray himself later pointed out, this shifted the drama into a clumsy, melodramatic gear that he would have resisted.

That said, there is much to enjoy in the film, which until now has only really found favour in France. Ray’s dramatising of individual scenes is full of inspired framings and shows a great sympathy for the locale, while the aura of authenticity is aided by the use of actors unfamiliar on the big screen. A notably restrained Christopher Plummer, playing Murdock in only his second big-screen role, was joined by Israeli former air hostess Chana Eden, the famous striptease artiste Gypsy Rose Lee, a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, a boxer, a jockey and a circus clown; under a beard, Peter Falk made his film debut (having been rejected by others because of his lazy eye).

The only ‘name’ performer was Burl Ives as the imposing Cottonmouth, splendidly ambiguous at least when under the direction of Ray. While the opening scenes of the film are clearly heavily compressed from a longer edit, and the conclusion disappointingly conventional, what lies between is dramatically cogent and in its central thrust more than justifies Bertrand Tavernier’s suggestion that this is “the first ecological film”.

Disc: A good transfer of the film, but the French subtitles can’t be removed. The extras are also in French only. (DT)

Also released

Stanley Kubrick: Visionary Filmmaker Collection

Lolita/2001: *A Space Odyssey*/
A Clockwork Orange/Barry Lyndon/
The Shining/Full Metal Jacket/
Eyes Wide Shut

Stanley Kubrick; 1961-99; Warner Home Video/Region-free Blu-ray; Certificate 18

This month’s releases reviewed by Sergio Angelini, Michael Atkinson, Michael Brooke, Trevor Johnston, Geoffrey Macnab, Nick Pinkerton, Kate Stables and David Thompson

Tales Out of School: 4 Films by David Leland

Birth of a Nation/*Flying into the Wind*/*R.H.I.N.O.*/*Made in Britain*

Central Independent Television/ITV; UK 1983; Network Region 2 DVD/Region B Blu-ray; 379 minutes; Certificate 18; Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: ‘Digging for Britain’ and ‘Twice Told Tales’; commemorative booklet by Dave Rolinson, image gallery

Programme: The success of the Alan Clarke-directed *Made in Britain*, with its show-stopping debut from Tim Roth as the violent, self-destructive yet articulate teenage skinhead with a swastika tattooed on his forehead, has tended to draw attention away from the other components of the ‘Tales out of School’ quartet to which it belongs. This two-disc set redresses the imbalance, not least by foregrounding the role of writer David Leland.

Originally shown by ITV in the summer of 1983 on four successive Sundays, this is a vivid and intense critique of the state of British education under Thatcher. It begins explosively with *Birth of a Nation*, an apocalyptic view of a London comprehensive under siege from students within and without, concluding in fire and blood. A sequence in which corporal punishment is presented as a gang rape, when several teachers straddle a knife-wielding bully to smack his bottom with a slipper – much to the horror of Jim Broadbent’s new teacher – is still shocking. Robert Stephens, with an occasionally wavering Welsh accent, tries to dispel his colleague’s idealism, admonishing him that, “You have entered an educational wasteland where the fertile soil of intelligence ends and the desert of ignorance begins.”

The despairing tone continues in *R.H.I.N.O.* (‘Really Here In Name Only’), which chronicles the eventual institutionalisation of a truant 15-year-old girl when she falls between the cracks of social-service provision. Like *Made in Britain*, it focuses on a young individual desperate to escape the conformity imposed by a system lacking in plurality and flexibility.

More naturalistic and less obviously didactic, *Flying into the Wind* looks at home education and contrasts the urban squalor of the other films with a bucolic idyll in the Fens. In its scope (it’s set over a decade) and tough, non-sense direction by Edward Bennett, this is easily the most restrained and quietly affecting of the quartet.

As a totality, these films still convey a palpable sense of urgency in their cry for reform, depicting institutional malaise and the boundaries of a system no longer fit for purpose. It’s a bracingly delivered message.

Discs: Originated on 16mm film, the transfers to HD are often remarkably sharp and clear of age-related debris, though *Flying into the Wind* suffers badly from digital noise. An extensive



Made in Britain A show-stopping debut from Tim Roth as the violent, self-destructive yet articulate teenage skinhead with a swastika tattoo

and well-researched booklet and 70 minutes of new documentaries provide much-needed context and some fascinating insights. (SA)

The Terence Rattigan Collection

BBC; UK 1961-94; 2 entertain/Region 2; 841 minutes; Certificate 12; Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: scenes from ‘Separate Tables’ at the Apollo and ‘Cause Célèbre’ at Her Majesty’s Theatre

Programme: The centenary of Terence Rattigan’s birth provides the impetus for this release, which combines many of the playwright’s best-known works with some genuine rarities. The titles range from a fairly inert staging of the 1936 hit comedy *French Without Tears* (1976), where Michael Gambon struggles manfully with an ill-fitting beard, to *All on Her Own* (1968), Rattigan’s last original BBC television play, a 20-minute invocation by a mourning widow (played by the author’s beloved Margaret Leighton) for the husband she has only come to love after his death.

There is a powerfully melancholic undercurrent in much of the work displayed here, focusing time and again on the final flickering of life’s dying embers. In *After the Dance*, set among the remnants of the bright young things of the 1920s, Gemma Jones gives a richly nuanced performance as the giddy wife who has never admitted to her husband – who is now leaving her – how much she loves him. The play’s climax will knock the wind out of any but the most stone-hearted.

Even better is the 1994 television presentation of Karel Reisz’s

magnificent stage revival of *The Deep Blue Sea* (subsequently adapted by Terence Davies for his forthcoming feature), with Penelope Wilton as the middle-aged woman driven to despair by the end of her affair with Colin Firth’s ex-RAF fighter pilot. Ian Holm is particularly fine as the cuckolded husband, a role he also plays to heartbreaking perfection in a 1985 production of another Rattigan perennial, *The Browning Version*, which pairs him with Judi Dench as his equally sad, less-than-kind wife.

Two surprising and welcome inclusions are *Adventure Story*, a rarely performed piece about a neurotic Alexander the Great, played by Sean Connery with a beguiling mixture of youthful exuberance and God-complex paranoia; and *Heart to Heart*, a still topical survey of the media landscape from 1962 with Kenneth More as a TV interviewer wrestling with his conscience over whether or not to reveal the chicanery of Ralph Richardson’s cabinet minister during a live broadcast.

Rattigan’s characteristic explorations of frailty, emotional reticence, inner conflict and a peculiarly British inability to express deep-rooted feelings are ably represented by this well-organised anthology. If occasionally lacking (Michael Darlow’s 1977 profile of Rattigan and his production of *The Winslow Boy* starring Emma Thompson are disappointingly omitted), it still provides much to impress.

Disc: The image and video transfers are more than adequate, including the telerecordings from the 1960s. Extras are minimal. (SA)

Man of action

David Thomson *wants more from a long-awaited biography of Raoul Walsh*

Raoul Walsh: The True Adventures of Hollywood's Legendary Director

By Marilyn Ann Moss, The University Press of Kentucky, 482pp, £34.95, ISBN 9780813133935

This is a book made out of affection, respect and lengthy research – and surely we have waited long enough for a proper account of the life and work of Raoul Walsh in English. Marilyn Ann Moss's bibliography shows how many books there have been on the director from France, Italy and Spain, without anything from America or Britain (though Walsh was one of those honoured in Richard Schickel's 'The Men Who Made the Movies' television series in 1973). Walsh's 1972 novel 'La Colère des justes' was translated and published in France, but it has never appeared in English. As a stylist, Walsh had a cult following in Paris, and 'Positif' ran three special issues on him. Few witnesses have helped this book more than Pierre Rissient (publicist, filmmaker, theorist, connoisseur and eminence, as well as Walsh's friend). Ms Moss takes her epigraph from Rissient, and it is worth quoting. If only all of this book lived up to its eloquence and insight:

"In the best films of Raoul Walsh, you can see the way he can put people into action... where they don't act but move and express, indirectly, subconsciously, their experience of life.

"What makes something happen?

"The placement of the camera.

"The angle.

"The lens.

"The distance of the camera from the scene.

"The physical execution."

As befits the guiding editor of the University Press of Kentucky's film series, Patrick McGilligan, the great value of this book is in the depth and flavour of its research. Walsh was a phenomenon of action, on screen, in his life and in sheer labour. His credits reach from 1913 to 1964, and his zest for projects delighted Fox, Paramount and especially Warner Bros, where he thrived in the wartime era when production was supposedly being cut back. Walsh directed four films for release in 1941, two in 1942, two in 1943, one in 1944 and three in 1945. If you're inclined to think that was too much haste, note that the 12 included 'High Sierra', 'The Strawberry Blonde', 'They Died with Their Boots On', 'Gentleman Jim' and 'Objective, Burma!', plus helpful additions to several studio films credited to others.

Ms Moss has scoured the Warners papers, she has had assistance from family members and friends, and she has interviewed everyone she could think of. The detail on preparation, money and



Gentleman Raoul: Walsh provided a model for Errol Flynn in their films together

production is remarkable and very human. So the studio dope is leavened with great stories. These include the eventual anguish and litigation that dragged on after Walsh's first marriage, to the actress Miriam Cooper. Far happier was his third union, with the gorgeous Mary Simpson, his junior by 36 years. As a semi-retired film director, famous for the black patch masking the eye he lost in 1929 when a rabbit came through his windscreen, Walsh began to paint. He started with nude studies of Mary (in movies he had always battled censorship), and then found another pliant and younger model. When Mary came upon the two of them in his studio, she promptly made a bonfire of the rival painting – with Walsh nodding approval at the kind of scene where action really expressed life experience.

More entertaining still is the discovery and quotation of a letter from Errol Flynn

Raoul Walsh was a phenomenon of action, on screen and in his life

to Warners production manager T.C. Wright, on the dismal dressing rooms provided on location for 'Objective, Burma!': "My dressing room, as we laughingly call it, had certain novel features. I counted as many as ten holes in the canvas sides through which I found some children examining me in the act of robing and disrobing. One other quite noticeable feature was the floor. At Whittier, for instance, it consisted of a thin strip of moth-eaten matting, much torn and ratted. It only covered a minute portion of the dressing room, the rest was solid cow-dung. This undoubtedly

explains the fascination [it] held for ten million assorted insects. There was no privacy of any kind, and perhaps you are not aware that not one of these dressing rooms had a latch unless you can call one of my shoelaces jammed in the opening [a latch]."

That's only a fraction of an ironic and literate letter. But it's not just colour, for it begins to suggest the creative bond between Flynn and Walsh, and the way the actor took his director as a model. They were together on eight films, and Flynn was athletic, charming, handsome, amused and amusing, a master at doing action without introspection or neurosis. Who could have done better as Custer or Jim Corbett – gentlemen, heroes and rebellious lads, the extension of Doug Fairbanks in 'The Thief of Bagdad', John Wayne in 'The Big Trail' or Spencer Tracy in 'Me and My Gal'? Walsh was born in New York in 1887, but Irishness was at work on both sides of his family, and many of Walsh's heroes are Irish types, minus the alcoholic gloom that tinges so many of Ford's heroes.

Flynn was vital to Walsh, but we should not forget the director's appreciation of more troubled men. Thus 'High Sierra' was as important for Walsh as it was for its star, Humphrey Bogart. And Bogart's Roy Earle prepared the way for Robert Mitchum in 'Pursued' (1947), a groundbreaking psychological western; Joel McCrea in 'Colorado Territory' (1949), a western remake of 'High Sierra'; Cagney's Cody Jarrett in 'White Heat' (1949); and even Gregory Peck in 'Captain Horatio Hornblower' (1951), which seems to me more a study of a repressed or neurotic commander than Ms Moss notices.

This is where I come to the texture Pierre Rissient sees in Walsh, which allows him to transcend the ordinary limits of being an 'action director'. External action is vital to the movies, but only if there's inner action that compels it. Ms Moss doesn't always feel this, and she sometimes writes awkwardly. Try this, on 'White Heat':

"In Walsh's hands, 'White Heat' moves to the rhythm of bullets, each one shooting out from the frame as if the entire scenario, with its psychotic, mother-loving killer and its trigger-happy anger,



Villain: James Cagney in 'White Heat'



Hero: Errol Flynn in 'They Died with Their Boots On'

FURTHER READING

When Movies Mattered: Reviews from a Transformative Decade

By Dave Kehr, The University of Chicago Press, 290pp, £14.50, ISBN 9780226429410

wants to rouse postwar American society in even newer ways than Warner Bros had already managed to do with nearly two decades of the gangster genre."

I find that inflated, but worse, I think it's based on an error. Cody is not in love with Ma in an Oedipal way (as Moss asserts). He needs her like an infant who has not matured. That's why he sits in her lap – and Moss is good on how that startling scene came about. Equally, the author gives a useful account of the mess-hall scene where Cody goes berserk when he hears of Ma's death. Warners had wanted it shot in a chapel! Walsh argued and begged for the studio machine shop for half a day – and then did Cody's skittering dance in one take!

But Ms Moss does not seem to have seen what may be Walsh's most passionate moment in that scene. There is no account of the news of Ma being passed along a table of prisoners, and nothing on the quality of Cagney's moaning and roars, or the demented physicality of his breakdown and the small army of guards required to restrain him. So the scene is referred to, but not felt – and as Rissient has said, Walsh is concerned with "the experience of life".

Nothing detracts from the historic value of this book – even if it comes decades too late, in an age when the action movie has become a label of abuse. But Ms Moss misses a lot. 'The Man I Love' (1947) is not a good film, but in a long book it is folly not to mention the mood-struck opening where Ida Lupino (dubbed by Peg La Centra) does the title song – that is one of the great musical numbers in a non-musical film, and plainly referred to in Scorsese's 'New York, New York'. But Ida Lupino is poorly treated altogether. Ms Moss thinks her murderess in 'They Drive by Night' (1940) sideswipes the robust guys' story; I suspect it deepens a rather routine movie.

My biggest complaint is saved for 'Gentleman Jim'. Ms Moss likes or loves the film, and she writes well about some of its camerawork. But she omits its most gracious, tender and Walshian moment, when the defeated John L. Sullivan (Ward Bond) comes to congratulate Jim Corbett (Flynn) on his victory. The action here is simple and muted, but the display of a code of manhood and respect is not just heartbreaking and filled with honour – it is as precious and hushed a scene as when, in 'The Searchers', the same Ward Bond sees a sister-in-law treasure the military cloak that belonged to John Wayne's Ethan Edwards.

As Pierre Rissient admitted, Walsh was too professional to make only good films. He lived long enough to be stranded – he simply didn't understand the politics of 'The Naked and the Dead' (1958). Still, out of a hundred films I can vouch for a third of them being true to their period, alive and exciting still. I don't know how many people remember Raoul Walsh (he died in 1980). But I know why they should.

Dave Kehr is one of the most gifted film critics to come out of America, the peer of James Agee and Pauline Kael. He was around 18 in 1971 when, with a newly ignited passion for cinema – and specifically for *Cahiers du cinéma*'s form of auteurism, as mediated by Andrew Sarris – he left his Chicago suburb to enrol at the University of Chicago. His big break came, professionally at least, on his appointment in 1986 as film critic of the *Chicago Tribune*, one of America's half-dozen most important newspapers. In 1992 he moved to New York's largest-circulation paper, the tabloid *Daily News*, and then in 2000 to the nation's most prestigious paper, *The New York Times*, to write a regular discursive column called 'At the Movies'.

As he pushes 60, Kehr has chosen to publish not a comprehensive survey of his writings to date, but a selection of the reviews of new films and revivals he contributed as the first movie critic of a local free sheet, the *Chicago Reader*, between 1974, when presumably he was still an undergraduate, and 1986, when he moved on to the better-remunerated and more widely circulated *Tribune*. The defiant and elegiac title explains why he took this decision, and the subtitle indicates the particular significance he attaches to this period, a golden age in American film culture.

Movies mattered because the cinema had at last been accepted as the great art of our time. The critics-turned-directors of the French New Wave had

transformed our understanding of Hollywood history – and of the director as unifying creative force – and movie critics had been given an authority and centrality they'd never previously possessed. The eccentrically edited alternative press thrown up by the 1960s ethos – papers like the *LA Weekly* and the *Chicago Reader* – had given young critics the opportunity to write longer, more searching reviews of less obviously mainstream movies, and to find a responsive audience among other cinephiles.

This trend began to fade in the 1980s; since he left the *Reader*, Kehr and his contemporaries have enjoyed less freedom and less space. As regards the subtitle, Kehr saw then – and sees even more clearly now – that his 12 years at the *Reader* encompassed crucial changes in American and world cinema: the Old Masters retired or died off, a new generation of US filmmakers sprang up in Hollywood and in the independent sector, and an equally individual if possibly less influential body of European cineastes came to the fore.

Less cheerfully, he recognises the ever-deepening gap between criticism in journals of general circulation and the theory-bound academic world, and the dire effects of "the brutal new commercialism" initiated in the late 1970s by *Jaws* and *Star Wars*. Reading this book, I was reminded of an encounter at Cannes in the early 1990s with a film programmer from the Chicago Art Institute, who told me that it was getting impossible to attract sizeable audiences to subtitled films.

Through the forceful historical introduction, the selection and

grouping of its 54 pieces (all single reviews, except for four perceptive essays on Lang, Dreyer, Hitchcock and Raoul Walsh) and the appendix of his 'ten best' lists for his years at the *Reader*, the book is a lucid celebration of that exciting period in moviegoing history. It's also an arresting critique of what we have lost and forfeited over the past quarter of a century, and a generous, thoughtful vindication of *la politique des auteurs*. Kehr ranges widely – from Ozu, Mizoguchi and Naruse to the early films of Walter Hill, John Carpenter, Terrence Malick and Warren Beatty – and he always goes to the heart of the matter.

Writing on the latter's *Reds*, for instance, his discussion of the film's formal similarity to a novel is persuasive, and there's characteristically memorable observation on actors directing themselves: "It's a safe bet that the results will be at least partly narcissistic, a contemplation of the self – obliquely in the case of Welles, lyrically in the case of Chaplin, compulsively in the case of Jerry Lewis. Beatty's self-scrutiny is remarkably sober and critical (though he has the vanity – and thank God for it – not to deny his natural charm and humour)."

But there's nothing bland or easily predictable about Kehr. He puts the boot into Bergman at every opportunity, and regards Blake Edwards's *10* as the best film of 1979, far superior to Allen's *Manhattan*. The most surprising aspect of the book is the absence of any discussion of the Vietnam War movies that were so significant a part of the late 1970s. *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now* aren't even mentioned.

Philip French



Contemplation of the self: Dave Kehr is perceptive about actors directing themselves, as Warren Beatty did in 'Reds'

FURTHER READING

Film England: Culturally English Filmmaking since the 1990s

By Andrew Higson, I.B. Tauris, 296pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781848854543

Currently professor of Film and Television at the University of York, Andrew Higson has devoted much of a two-decade career to thinking through conceptual and institutional questions of national cinema with reference to British films and the UK film industry. In its subtitle alone, however, his new book appears to set itself a formidable – if potentially fascinating – challenge. Since the 1960s, sociopolitical developments (reinforced by the influential Marxist critique of the British state known as ‘the Nairn–Anderson theses’) have destabilised British identity; since the mid-1990s, however, this process has accelerated acutely under the pressures of globalisation, neo-liberalism, devolution and multiculturalism – to a point where ‘Englishness’ now seems bewilderingly evanescent (to many Britons, if not to global audiences of the Harry Potter or Mr Bean franchises).

The present moment raises further paradoxes around the meaning of ‘cultural Englishness’ for British films, policy and critical culture. On the one hand, Marxist critics have long conceived of ‘Englishness’ as irredeemably entangled with the British class system – a viewpoint that inflected Higson’s earlier writings and provided a rigorous critical framework in the past decade’s most refreshing book on class, Englishness and British film: Paul Dave’s *Visions of England: Class and Culture in Contemporary Cinema*. On the other, the devolutionary thrust of New Labour’s policies in support of British film production (via the formation of the now-disbanded UK Film Council, the now-merged Scottish Screen and the



Englishness repackaged: Anne Hathaway as Jane Austen in ‘Becoming Jane’

still-extant Film Agency for Wales – but no equivalent body for England) has perhaps made possible by default a more positive understanding of ‘culturally English film’: one that might signal low budgets, representational or aesthetic risk-taking and a sensibility attuned to specifics of region and place – or equally, untold stories and a fresh approach to the popular – rather than the hegemonic, US-backed Englishness-for-export of Jane Austen or *Harry Potter*.

In many respects, *Film England* makes a valuable addition to the literature on the British cinema of the past two decades. (It’s currently one of only three books to extend detailed attention to Blair-era British – or post-devolutionary Scottish and Welsh – cinema beyond 2000, alongside James Leggott’s concise but effective *Contemporary British*

Cinema and Steve Blandford’s *Film, Drama and the Break-Up of Britain*.) Its strengths lie in its substantial – and very readable – early chapters on the industrial and policy context and the implications of globalisation (or, as Higson puts it, “a film business increasingly transnational in its production arrangements”) for British production and the nature of the ‘British’ films produced. The role of the now-gone UKFC is explained in useful detail, as is the post-2007 points-based UK ‘cultural test’ for funding allocation. However, Higson’s portrayal of the latter as a smoothly hegemonic instrument favouring bankable versions of export-Englishness displays a simplistic reductiveness that, frustratingly, recurs elsewhere.

The institutional approach also

proves fruitful in the later chapters (forming almost two thirds of the book). In an updated, transnationalised extension of the period-film focus of Higson’s earlier book *English Heritage, English Cinema* (2003), these explore cross-media relationships between ‘quality’ literary adaptations such as *Atonement* (2007) and the transnational publishing industry; the “Jane Austen adaptation business” and its connections with heritage tourism; and “intimate and epic versions of the national past”. (Here, lists of familiar Forster, James and Dickens adaptations, more Austen, and newer but frustratingly little-discussed retro biopics provide the intimacy, while US blockbusters such as Jerry Bruckheimer’s \$90 million 2004 production *King Arthur* – ‘culturally British’ in its story origins and casting – represent the epic.)

As this summary might suggest, *Film England*’s disappointments lie in its disproportionate overload of Austen, big-budget Englishness-for-export and representations of the past in general – and its corresponding lack of (I would argue, necessary) engagement with the knotty definitional questions around ‘cultural Englishness’ or the related problematics sketched in my opening paragraphs. In fact, *Film England* could equally be subtitled ‘Institutionally British Filmmaking’, or ‘The England of Miramax and Warner Bros’. Most frustrating is Higson’s lack of appetite to engage with ‘English’ films from the lower-budget or indigenously popular segments of the spectrum. If this missed opportunity echoes the market-driven populism of the UKFC before its demise, it also leaves the field open for more varied books on the British cinema of the past decade. **✦ Claire Monk**

Shoah

By Sue Vice, BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 98pp, £9.99, ISBN 9781844573257

When Claude Lanzmann was first embarking on the 13-year production of his monumental film *Shoah* (1985), he resolved that any aesthetic choices were inescapably also ethical ones, and accordingly set himself strict formal rules. These included the absolute rejection of any archive footage, Lanzmann judging that such footage – which in many cases had originally been filmed as propaganda – showed only a partial and therefore distorting account of events, whose visible age also served to create distance, confining events to the past. Out of the question too were dramatic re-enactments of the kind used in the widely seen 1978 US series *Holocaust* or later by Spielberg in *Schindler’s List* (1993), which Lanzmann has branded as “obscenities” for their attempts to depict the unknowable, and for offering the erroneous comfort of the ‘survivor’s story’ to a crime that claimed the lives of millions.

Instead Lanzmann resolved that his film must be about “death itself, death and not survival”, presented through interviews with the survivors, perpetrators, facilitators and witnesses, and through footage of the places where the crimes took place, as he found them 40 years later. It would also be specifically about the industrialised killings by gas in the East of Europe, and not, for instance, the mass shootings by the *Einsatzgruppen* who followed the German advance through the Soviet Union. (Lanzmann did, however, conduct several interviews with former SS men who had taken part in such shootings, and the footage can now be viewed at the online Steven Spielberg Film & Video Archive of the United States Holocaust Museum website.)

Following Primo Levi’s observation in *The Drowned and the Saved* that it was only the “drowned” whose knowledge of the Shoah was complete – and therefore lost – Lanzmann’s approach started with an essential contradiction. But as Sue Vice (a professor of English



Saved: Chelmno survivor Simon Srebnik

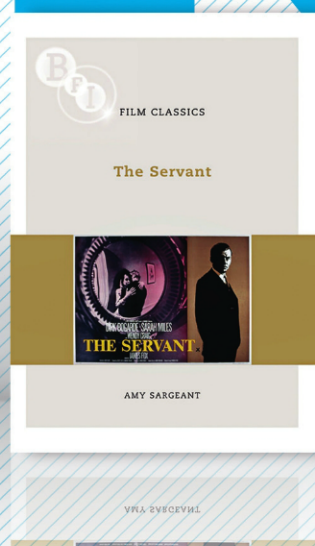
Literature at the University of Sheffield, who has written a number of books on different representations of the Holocaust) observes in her excellent monograph on *Shoah*, Lanzmann’s great achievement is that he “includes in his film those who lived so close to the machinery of death that they take on the status of ‘revenants’ who can speak on behalf of those who died”.

The resulting film is, in Lanzmann’s words, not a documentary but a meticulously constructed and edited

“fiction of the real” focused on specifics, through which the viewer is transported with overwhelming immediacy into the past. Vice works through the subtle formal methods Lanzmann uses to achieve that immediacy, such as the meticulous juxtaposition of image and voiceover interview, his varying “performative” roles as interviewer, and the very deliberate staging of the interviews themselves. She also covers areas where Lanzmann has faced criticism (some have seen his portrait of Poland as unfairly negative), offering robust defences of his approach.

On occasion Vice’s citation of the opinions of mainstream press critics and her choice of examples of other films are somewhat erratic, but those are very minor quibbles about a concise, balanced and authoritative book, which makes a fine complement to the essential collection of essays assembled by editor Stuart Liebman for the OUP book *Claude Lanzmann’s ‘Shoah’: Key Essays*. **✦ James Bell**

Read

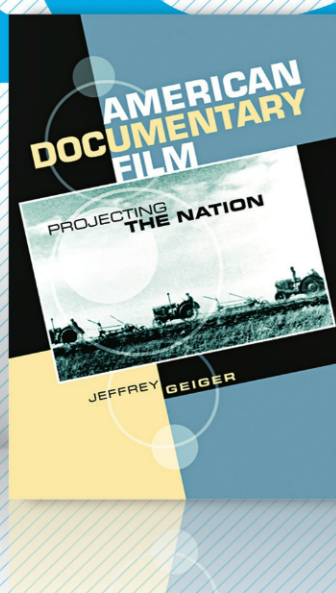


The Servant

By Amy Sargeant, BFI Film Classics, BFI/Palgrave MacMillan, 120pp, illustrated, paperback, £9.99, ISBN 9781844573820

This illuminating study of Joseph Losey's *The Servant* (1963) offers a detailed discussion of the film's production, reception and history as one of the early-1960s émigré films. Amy Sargeant asserts that *The Servant* provided a platform for Dirk Bogarde's career, setting him up for similar roles in subsequent films by auteurs Visconti, Fassbinder and Resnais. She explores Harold Pinter's adaptation of Robin Maugham's novella and the film's use of architecture and interior design to establish character and relationships.

www.palgrave.com/bfi



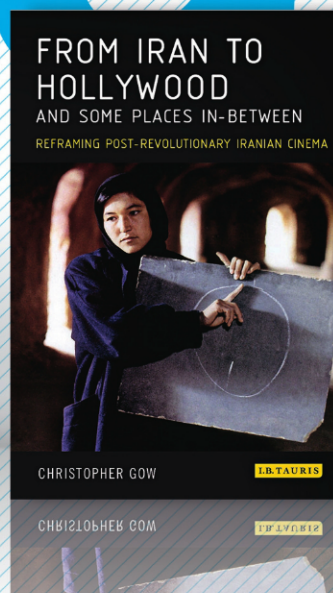
American Documentary Film: Projecting the Nation

By Jeffrey Geiger, Edinburgh University Press, 288pp, illustrated, paperback, £24.99, ISBN 9780748621484

This book examines how documentary films have contributed to the American public sphere – creating a form of public space that serves as a site for community building, public expression and social innovation. Jeffrey Geiger focuses on how documentaries have been significant in creating ideas of the nation, both as an imagined space and a real place.

Moving from the dawn of cinema to the present day, this full-length study explores the extensive range and history of American non-fiction filmmaking. Combining comprehensive overviews with in-depth case studies, Geiger maps American documentary's intricate histories, detailing the impact of pre- and early cinema, travelogues, the avant garde, 1930s social documentary, propaganda, direct cinema, postmodernism and 'new' documentary.

www.eupublishing.com

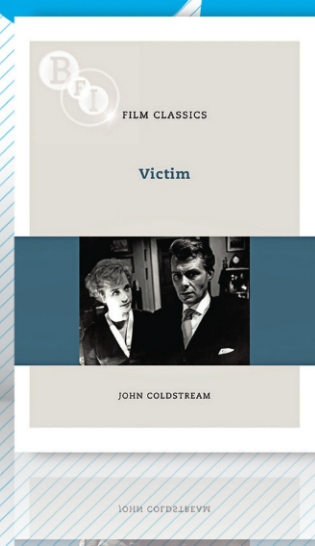


From Iran to Hollywood and Some Places In-Between: Reframing Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema

By Christopher Gow, IB Tauris, 256pp, paperback, £17.99, ISBN 9781848855274

Iranian cinema has been one of the most fascinating success stories in world cinema over the last 20 years, hailed as an alternative to the homogenising global influence of mainstream Hollywood. Christopher Gow examines how the success of this cinema and the films of its foremost proponent, Abbas Kiarostami, can be accounted for by the extent to which they fit pre-established notions of 'art cinema'. He also looks at links between the new Iranian cinema and émigré Iranian filmmaking, from the German films of Sohrab Shahid Sales to Vadim Perelman's exploration of the Iranian experience of exile in *House of Sand and Fog*. Gow reveals how this dispersed émigré Iranian cinema challenges our understanding of new Iranian cinema itself, as well as concepts of national cinema more generally.

www.ibtauris.com



Victim

By John Coldstream, BFI Film Classics, BFI/Palgrave MacMillan, 120pp, illustrated, paperback, £9.99, ISBN 9781844574278

Marking the 50th anniversary of the film's release, John Coldstream's intimate study of *Victim* (1961) addresses the film's importance in the campaign to decriminalise homosexuality in the UK. Coldstream explores the background to the production, focusing on the relationship between the filmmakers, the screenwriters and the censor John Trevelyan. Dirk Bogarde risked his box-office appeal to take on the central role in *Victim*, which became extremely influential in British cinema and made a vital contribution to gay cultural history.

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Top image: Graduates Evelina Enberg (left) and Danny Bell (right)
Bottom image: 'Carrie Floating in the Garden', Sukey Parnell



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Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN
Fax: 020 7436 2327
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Not LA women

Anna Smith or whoever wrote the synopsis for *Bridesmaids* (Reviews, S&S, July) must be the first person ever to mistake Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for Los Angeles, California. While one doesn't expect a British reviewer to recognise the repeated aerial shots of the city, its identity is repeatedly signalled in the opening few minutes of the film. For future reference, Angelenos rarely feel the need to go to Chicago, as Annie and her friends do, when they want a bit of glamour. If they did, they wouldn't drive: it's the better part of 2000 miles away.

Arthur Lindley

Hon Fellow, University of Birmingham

I'll give Anna Smith the benefit of the doubt and assume that, yet again, the sub-editor is to blame – but in her review of *Larry Crowne* (S&S, August), she tells only half of a joke she claims is funny – and it's not even the funny half!

"Are you clairvoyant?" asks Julia Roberts of a student without much grasp of English.

But what's supposedly funny is that he hears "Claire Voyant", and says, "No, I'm..." – and gives his name.

Jo ROLLIVER

London SW19

The art of programming

Lindsay Anderson and his producers benefited in 1988-89 from Kawakita Kashiko's inventiveness as a cinema operator when *The Whales of August* played three first-run engagements at Iwanami Hall, the specialised Tokyo cinema she ran ('Art for Art's Sake', S&S, August). This success typified the meticulous way Kawakita researched and marketed films – treatment markedly different from that afforded *The Whales* almost everywhere else.

Since it starred three very old American stars at the end of celebrated careers – Lillian Gish, Bette Davis and Vincent Price – Kawakita marketed the film to senior citizens with an exquisite poster and publicised a phone number

Miles away: 'Bridesmaids'



LETTER OF THE MONTH

Shedding light on digital

In response to Nicholas Sutton's letter (S&S, August) regarding the presentation of *13 Assassins* at the Curzon Renoir being digital rather than 35mm – the format in which the film was originally shot – it should be made clear that the decision is an economic rather than aesthetic one. The cost of producing a DCP [digital cinema package] is approximately £100, as opposed to circa £1000 required to strike each 35mm print. There is also a hefty creation cost to be accounted for. Digital presentation allows for greater diversity in our cinematic landscape and should be embraced.

I am delighted that Mr Sutton chose to see the film at the Curzon Renoir. The cinema has a long tradition as an 'arthouse' establishment and this year alone has showcased titles including *Le quatre volte* [pictured], *A Separation*,



Nénette, Meek's Cutoff, Cave of Forgotten Dreams, Treacle Jr. and Potiche. Each and every one of these titles was presented in a digital format, as it would be at the

majority of cinemas in the UK.

Jason Wood

Director of Programming,
Curzon Cinemas

for transport to screenings. Patrons were offered an elegant 32-page programme incorporating biographies of the lead players, an essay on Anderson's filmography and credits for principal cast and crew.

Anderson's archives hold a letter from Kawakita expressing her pleasure at filling the house three times daily. "The audiences are mainly housewives in the daytime and evening office girls... There are many women who are fans of Lillian Gish. The faces of the audiences after the show are thoughtful and impressed."

Barry Spikings, then CEO of the film's distributor Nelson, told Anderson that it was one of Japan's four biggest-grossing pictures that year.

John Izod

Professor of Screen Analysis, Film, Media & Journalism, University of Stirling

Lost in translation

We have to give Godard credit for something – every reviewer of *Film Socialisme* has been obliged to place on record the subtitles they have seen, and make at least oblique reference to their own level of linguistic competence. Whilst Brad Stevens describes the subtitles as "fragmented" (Reviews, S&S, August), in a panel we partly shared at the recent NECS [European Network for Cinema and Media Studies] conference, Samuel Bréan pointed out that, on occasions, the subtitles displayed words inaudible in the French.

It is possible that Godard, at excessive filmic length, has made the most apt point in the debate in these columns about what credits need to be shown with a review 'of record'. The only artistic component that can and does differ for different contemporary reviewers of the same film is whether they needed a translation and, if so, who supplied it. With the exception of *Film Socialisme*,

this is almost never recorded. In my research of the early Western reception of Japanese films, it is painfully obvious that comprehension of language, and the lack of it, radically affected what reviewers 'saw' – and, I suggest, we have changed less than we think. For Godard's hero, Henri Langlois, a complete absence of translation would often be preferred, and this surely contributed to some of the more 'essentialist' takes on the oriental.

For a review 'of record' in the internet age, I suggest that the only essential credits, besides title and date, are the length, the source and the translator(s).

Roger Macy

Tunbridge Wells, Kent

Weekend bias

In his editorial (S&S, August), Nick James notes that the top six places for box-office returns for the weekend 10 to 12 June were occupied by sequels. Why is it that, almost invariably, the publicised weekly top box-office films lists relate to the Friday-to-Sunday takings? I would guess there is a significant difference between this list and that for Monday to Thursday. Many older filmgoers prefer to avoid the weekend crowds and go on a weekday afternoon, and such patrons are unlikely to be interested in teen movies, for example (or indeed in sequels). I suspect that a film like *The Tree of Life* is likely to show up much more favourably in a Monday-to-Thursday list than in the more conventional weekend one.

Alan Pavelin

Chislehurst, Kent

'Numbers' columnist Charles Gant replies:

Most films open on Friday, and box-office figures are released on the first work day after that date, Monday, reporting on the first three days of play, which for most movies represents the majority of week 1 takings. Films are then rebooked into cinemas for the following weekend, based to some degree on how they have fared so far.

A fuller picture would emerge if the figures were only reported on Friday, after a whole week of play, but people are impatient to know the numbers, and the industry certainly needs to know so that bookings can be made and info passed on to listings services including 'Time Out'.

Taking 'The Tree of Life' as an example, my figures show a Fri-Sat-Sun opening of £406,062, then a Mon-Tue-Wed-Thu gross of £249,236, followed by a second weekend of £267,866. Mr Pavelin is correct that some films with an older/upmarket audience skew perform better midweek – just not this one.

Unlucky for some

We have just been forced to walk out of a cinema for the first time since *Caligula* in the 80s. That was for the sickeningly graphic depiction of violence in *13 Assassins* (Film of the Month, S&S, June).

We left as the evil lord was shooting arrows at a roped-up infant. We had already experienced the sound effects of the ritual disembowelment and the overlong depiction of the mutilated survivor of the "Total Massacre".

I wish in no way to advance the censoring of movies. There will be those who will relish such scenes. But I would ask you to warn your readers of such content and to suggest that a 15 certificate is inappropriate to the film.

John Dinning

By email

Additions & corrections

August p.62 *Bobby Fischer against the World*, Cert 12A, 93m 55, 8,377 ft +8 frames; p.62 *Born to Be Wild 3D*, Cert U, 40m 43s, 58,630 ft; p.66 *Film Socialisme*, Cert PG, 101m 40s, 9,150+0 frames; p.68 *Hobo with a Shotgun*, Cert 18, 86m 28, 7,743 ft +6 frames; p.72 *The Light Thief*, Cert 15, 79m 42s, 7,173 ft +7 frames; p.73 *Poetry*, Cert 12A, 139m 16s, 12,534 ft +0 frames; p.75 *The Round Up*, Cert 12A, 125m 7s, 11,260 ft +8 frames; p.75 *Sawako Decides*, Cert 12A, 112m 28, 10,083 ft +0 frames; p.77 *Super*, Cert 18, 96m 28, 8,643 ft +0 frames; p.78 *Treacle Jr.*, Cert 15, 80m 48, 7,429 ft +8 frames

DEEP END

A lost classic comes to DVD

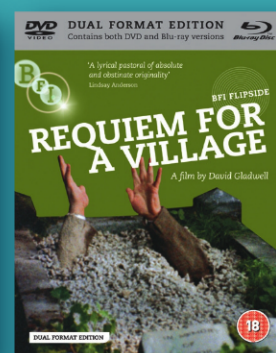


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